

April 2021

## Smokeyumper Magazine, April 2021

National Smokeyumper Association

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THE NATIONAL SMOKEJUMPER  
ASSOCIATION

QUARTERLY MAGAZINE  
APRIL 2021

# SMOKEJUMPER



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## Message from the President



by **Bob McKean**  
(Missoula '67)

THE NATIONAL SMOKEJUMPER Association (NSA) is steeped in service. Examples abound. For over 20 years, the NSA has engaged in trail maintenance involving many hundreds of volunteers on projects across the United States; trails and historical sites have been restored that might not otherwise have received appropriate care; and all with significant savings to the Forest Service and Park Service. The NSA has provided innumerable scholarships to smokejumpers and members of their families. The NSA has provided direct aid to members of the greater smokejumper family with unique needs through its Good Samaritan Fund.

Most smokejumpers are deeply connected to their smokejumping experience and bonded to their fellow jumpers. Smokejumping made a powerful impact on the lives of most. Consequently, members want to volunteer time or

financial support to the NSA to further its mission. In short, a powerful ethos exists among us to "give back."

With that in mind, it gives me great pleasure to announce that we have recently added three new NSA Board members, all of whom share the "give back" ethos. Each will bring valuable skills and experience to our Board.

**Pferron Doss** trained in Missoula in 1977 and jumped out of Missoula through 1979. He subsequently had a lengthy career in personnel management both with the Forest Service and in private industry. Pferron has already contributed his time assisting in various historical preservation projects for the NSA. He will initially serve on the Historical Preservation Committee.

**Patrick McGunagle** trained in 2019 and jumped through 2020 with the West Yellowstone Smokejumpers. Patrick has already contributed columns to the NSA magazine, *Smokejumper*. His recency of experience and connections with active smokejumpers are invaluable assets that speak for themselves. He will serve as Liaison to Current Jumpers.

**Joe Stutler** trained in Missoula in 1971 and jumped through 1973. Subsequently, Joe has had a lengthy career in fire at many levels including management at the most senior level. Last fall, Joe was

the Area Commander for the three large fires (a combined 500,000 acres) in Northwest Oregon. He is currently a Senior Advisor for Deschutes County, Oregon; Wildland Fire Cohesive Strategy, Western Region Co-Chair; and Area Commander, Area Command Team #1. Joe will add invaluable intellectual capital to the NSA Board due to his knowledge of the current fire situation and connections in the fire community.

Additionally, it is my pleasure to announce that **Mike Bina** (MSO-68) has been elected to serve as Board Secretary. Mike has been on the Board for several years. He retired from a career as a special educator of programs for visually impaired students and adults. He served for many years as CEO/Superintendent of public and private residential schools for blind and visually impaired students.

I would like to thank all of these individuals for their willingness to serve.

Finally, I would like to thank all of our mem-

bers who have volunteered time, money, or energy to the NSA over the years to further its mission. The NSA is your organization, and the smoke-jumper community can always use and, deeply appreciates, your support. 🙏

NSA board members are **Robert A. McKean** President MSO 67,69,73-79,81 WYS 68 **James L. Cherry** Past President Executive Committee Member and Scholarship Committee Member MSO 57,59 **Charles N. Sheley** 1st Vice President and Magazine Managing Editor Executive Committee Member CJ 59-66, ANC 67, FBX 68-70 **Michael J. Bina** Secretary Executive Committee Member and Scholarship Committee Member MSO 68-69 **Larry C. Lufkin** Website Coordinator Executive Committee Member and Scholarship Committee Member CJ 63-67, 69-71 **Charlotte C. Larson** Pilot Representative **John A. Packard** Financial Investments RAC 65 **Jim Lindell** General Counsel IDC 64-66, MYC 88 **Fred Cooper** Trails Program Coordinator NCSB 62-63 RAC 64-67 **Mike McMillan** NSA Photo Project Coordinator Scholarship Committee Member FBX 96-12 **John D. Berry** Treasurer and Facebook Coordinator RAC 70-71 **Bill Derr** Associates Representative **Denis Breslin** NCSB 69-71

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#### *Smokejumper base abbreviations:*

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

### Having Correct Email Addresses Is Very Important

In order to save the NSA time and money, I'm mailing the merchandise flyer to you via email. There is a significant amount of money spent in printing and inserting the merchandise flyer into the magazine. Sending via email is a good cost-efficient move.

In addition, I did over 5,000 reunion mailings last year. Remember that the National Reunion has been postponed until June 24-26, 2022, in Boise. With good email addresses, we can cut that USPS mailing in half.

To see if we have your correct email address, go to the NSA website at [www.smokejumpers.com](http://www.smokejumpers.com). Click on "News and Events" at the top of the page. Click on "Jump List" on the pull-down, type in your **last name**.

That will bring up the email currently listed for you. Please contact me if we need to update your email. My contact information is in the left column on this page. (Ed.)

# Air America, The Ranch and The Veil of Secrecy

by Johnny Kirkley (Cave Junction '64)

Air America, the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, and a secret air base in Takhli, Thailand, known as “The Ranch,” have a storied history that merged during the Vietnam War. The U.S. military operated overtly and the CIA operated covertly from 1960 to 1975 at “The Ranch.” Over 50 of the 100 former smokejumpers who worked for the CIA saw duty at “The Ranch.” Ten lost their lives. This is a disclosure of operations and events that killed some of those ten, plus others.

“The Ranch” had its beginnings in early 1950 when China began sending arms across the border to Ho Chi Minh’s revolutionaries. The CIA concluded that the continued support of Civil Air Transport (CAT) as a covert operative was in the national interest. The U.S. Departments of State, Defense, and Joint Chiefs of Staff agreed that CAT was a secure, reliable source of transportation to move personnel and supplies and ideal for engaging in various clandestine activities. This action on CAT reflected Washington officials’ concern about communist advances in Asia supporting their “domino theory” fearing all Asian countries becoming communist. In August 1950, a CIA team travelled to Bangkok and negotiated an agreement with the Thai National Police to equip and train 350 Thai police and military personnel as a counterinsurgency force. The aid was channeled through a newly created

CIA proprietary, Southeast Asia Supply Company and thus began a unique governmental relationship between the US and Thailand that lasted 25 years.

The early history of CAT is complicated. In 1946, Claire Chennault and Whiting Willauer signed a contract creating Chinese National Relief and Rehabilitation Air Transport. It began operation in 1947 by carrying relief supplies from coastal ports into the interior of China. As the civil war in China expanded in 1948, CAT became more involved with Chiang Kai-shek’s Nationalists fighting against Mao Tse-tung’s Communist forces. When the Nationalists were defeated, CAT settled in Taipei, Taiwan, with part of the fleet financed by Chiang Kai-shek’s Republic of China (ROC). In 1950, the CIA purchased CAT as a CIA proprietary airline. (US government-owned companies are required to go through congress. CIA’s proprietary companies are not closely scrutinized or congressionally approved). CAT then became CAT Inc., an American company operating as a Taipei-based commercial airline (Civil Air Transport), according to a special permission (franchise) awarded to General Chennault and a Tachikawa, Japan, based contract carrier CAT Inc. Because the ROC insisted that only a Chinese company could operate out of Taiwan, the franchise question became a political football kicked back and forth between Washington and Taipei. After years



CAT C-46 1958 (Courtesy Frank Gonzalez Collection)



CAT DC-6

(Courtesy Internet)



of negotiating, a new structure came out in 1955 creating three companies:

1. Civil Air Transport Co Ltd., a Chinese company
2. Asiatic Aeronautical Co Ltd., a Taiwan maintenance station, later Air Asia Co Ltd.
3. CAT Inc. (a CIA proprietary), in part owned Air Asia Co Ltd.

A directive by President Eisenhower in 1955 approved what was later to become known as the 303 Committee. It provided oversight and policy for covert activities initiated by the CIA, implying that the agency was an instrument of the U.S. Government, not the government itself. In March 1959 CAT was renamed Air America Inc.

Takhli Royal Thai Air Force Base was built in the mid-1950s about 150 miles northwest of Bangkok, Thailand. In January 1958, there was nothing at the airport except a long Strategic Air Command recovery runway and fuel. At this time the Thai government began allowing the United States to use the base for covert operations in Southeast Asia. CAT took military C-118A and DC-6 flights from Okinawa and moved them to Takhli. This continued a decade of CIA covert support supplying food and ammunition to Tibet. At the urging of CIA point man, **Garfield Thorsrud** (MSO-46), CAT Tibet flights began using C-130s in July 1959.

In November 1959, reconnaissance missions over Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Tibet, and China were part of the "Fast Move" operation. Necessary supplies and personnel rendezvoused with a U-2 that had been ferried into Takhli. On April 5, 1960, a mission over China experienced mechanical problems. The U-2 was forced to make a crash landing in a rice paddy far short of Takhli. Since the area was inaccessible to large vehicles, the U-2 had to

be cut into pieces to be moved. In appreciation for assistance by local villagers, the CIA funded a new school. After the U-2 flown by Francis Gary Powers was shot down over Russia on May 1, 1960, all CIA planes were ordered not to violate international borders. U-2 missions were temporally suspended but later resumed and continued to be staged from Takhli throughout the 1960s.

USAF Major Harry "Heinie" Aderholt became the Senior CIA Air Operations Officer at Takhli and later was responsible for the construction of Lima STOL (short takeoff and landing) sites in Laos. Takhli C-46s and C-130s used former smokejumpers hired by the CIA as Parachute Dispatch Officers, (PDOs). These jumpers included **Roland "Andy" Andersen** (MSO-52), **Fred Barnowsky** (MSO-42), **Ray Beasley** (MYC-52), **Bill Demmons** (MSO-51), **Darrell "Yogi" Eubanks** (IDC-54), **Miles Johnson** (MYC-53), **Thomas "Shep" Johnson** (MYC-56), **Art Jukkala** (MSO-56), **John "Tex" Lewis** (MYC-53), **Dave Bevan** (MSO-55), **Richard "Pete" Peterson** (MYC-47), **Ray Schenck** (MSO-56), **Russell Kapitz** (MSO-58), **Don Courtney** (MSO-56), **Jack Cahill** (MSO-58), **Mike Oehlerich** (MSO-60) and **Jerry Daniels** (MSO-58). PDO duties rotated between rigging and loading the planes one day, to flying and dropping loads of food, aka *white rice*, and military supplies, aka *hard rice*, the following day.

Secrecy required Air America personnel to refer to Takhli as "The Ranch." A special CIA area was fenced off in a remote corner of the base. Flight operations were conducted in the hanger, but the area where the U-2 was stored was off limits to Air America crews. Resembling a military officers club, the compound included air conditioned barracks, cafeteria, day room and bar. The food was excep-



B-26 (Courtesy CIA)



Air America C-46 (Courtesy John Kirkley)

tional, movies were current, and the beer was plentiful. As hard as he tried, **Tom Greiner** (MSO-55) was never able to eat them out of ice cream.

Air America, Southern Air Transport and CAT aircraft flying covert missions out of “The Ranch” were completely “sanitized,” i.e., stripped of all markings including tail and serial numbers. A false FAA certificate of registration was put in the cockpit. In the event of a crash, the aircraft never existed. Air America crews were given special clearance for clandestine “black” missions. When these crews arrived to fly these missions, they changed into nondescript jumpsuits and removed all personal identification. Upon returning to “The Ranch” after a mission, the crew was given an envelope of cash, and the aircraft would go through a two to three hour procedure. Correct name and tail numbers were repainted, and FAA licenses and registration papers were put back on board to make the plane legal.

In 1961 Operation Millpond was a joint CIA-Pentagon covert operation designed to bomb the Plaine des Jarres (PDJ) in Laos. About 20 unmarked B-26 light bombers were stationed at Takhli. These planes were crewed by Air America and “sheep dipped” Alabama National Guard pilots. CIA “sheep dipping” established clean credentials for military pilots. The “Bay of Pigs” fiasco in Cuba resulted in President Kennedy cancelling “Millpond.”

The CIA began to organize the construction of STOL strips on mountainsides in Laos. US Navy Seabees were sent to Takhli to extend the runway at Sam Thong (LS-20) in Laos. By the end of the war, there were approximately 450 STOL sites in the Kingdom of Laos.

In May 1961, President Kennedy sent a letter stating that the supreme US representative in all

countries was the US Ambassador unless there was a military commander fighting a war in that country.

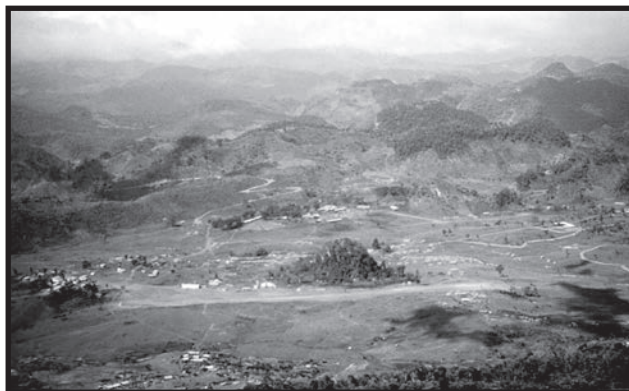
Interspersed with the Tibet missions were missions into Laos to support General Vang Pao’s Hmong guerrilla soldiers fighting against Kong Le’s Neutralist/Pathet Lao troops. On August 13, 1961, C-46 (#B-136) crashed when a wing tip hit a tree while making an aerial delivery at Pha Khao (LS-14) to Vang Pao’s Hmong army. Killed were Captain Norwood Forte, F/O Roger Sarno, PDO’s Darrel Eubanks (IDC-54), David Bevin (MSO-55) and John Lewis (MYC-53). They became the first Americans to die in the Secret War in Laos. Eubanks, Bevin and Lewis were honored in 2017 when three stars were added to the CIA Memorial Wall. This event greatly impacted the CIA when a major Texas newspaper published the story revealing its secret operations in Laos. The result was an end to the direct hiring of PDO’s by the Agency. Air Asia Co. Ltd. began hiring flight crews as contract personnel buffering CIA covert operations with “plausible deniability.” CIA PDO’s became Air America Air Freight Specialist (AFS), aka “Kickers.”

In a coup d’etat on August 9, 1960, Kong Le seized control of Vientiane and insisted that the Lao government return to a “policy of genuine neutrality.” In December Kong Le withdrew from Vientiane to the PDJ, after heavy fighting against pro-American Lao government forces, and joined his neutralist forces with the Pathet Lao. He stayed with Soviet support for two years. A disagreement ensued when they began denying his forces Soviet supplies. When an Air America C-46 resupplying his forces was shot down by pro-communist troops, a series of military clashes and assassinations on both sides started. Kong Le left the PDJ in 1963 to join



*LS-20A Long Tieng*

*(Courtesy Dan Gamelin)*



*LS-20 Sam Thong*

*(Courtesy Charlie Davis)*

Vang Pao whom he had been fighting against.

In response to threats along Thailand's border with Laos, Takhli was the first base to support combat-oriented recon missions. To carry out recon, a group of USAF F-100 Super Sabres was brought in from Cannon AFB, New Mexico.

In October 1961, two B-26s at Takhli flew photo reconnaissance missions on a demand basis. This project was called "Black Watch" and flown exclusively by Air America pilots. The pilots carried no identification and wore T-shirts, cutoffs, combat boots, 357 Magnums, and gold bracelets to exchange for food and safety if shot down.

Directed by Jack Maska (CIA), Pilot John Lee and AFS **Bob Herald** (MSO-55) flew several C-123 night missions from "The Ranch" into North Vietnam near Dien Bien Phu. Seeing the lights of Hanoi, they dropped loads of South Vietnamese soldiers into the jungle dressed in smokejumper style green canvas suits, helmets and masks. The soldiers monitored the roads for military traffic and gathered intelligence along the Lao border.

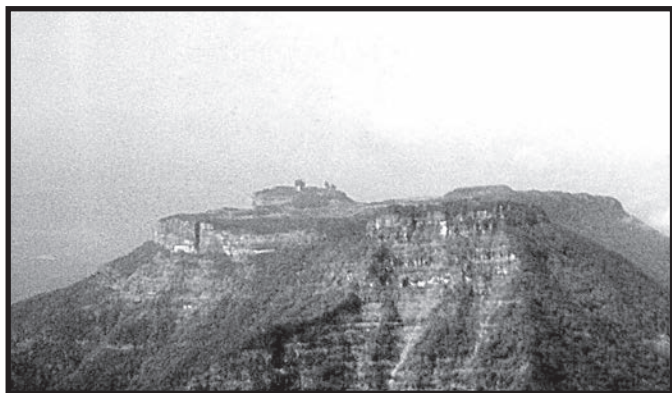
A "Declaration on the Neutrality of Laos" was reached in Geneva in July 1962. Instead of ending the Laotian war, both the US and Russia conspired to evade its official condemnations. Hanoi continued to send more troops into Laos while the CIA's Air America became involved in combat missions that went beyond its role of humanitarian aid. Also, Long Tieng (LS-98), later (LS-20 Alternate), was built to support military activities. "Alternate" became the busiest CIA base in Laos as the headquarters of Hmong General Vang Pao.

Starting in November 1962 until the 1970s, Southern Air Transport (SAT) flew shuttles from Kadena, Okinawa, to Takhli, to Charbatia, India,

code name "Oak Tree." Projects included flying Tibetan tribesmen "insurgents," military aid and equipment for building up a Tibetan resistance force. Insurgents cut communication lines and mined the roads between Tibet and China in order to slow the flow of Chinese soldiers and supplies into Tibet. The Takhli radar system shut down for these departing and returning flights so they wouldn't be on record. A couple hours before landing 100-200 miles out of Charbitia, these aircraft descended to 500 feet above the water to avoid Calcutta radar detection. Voice radio silence was maintained while a telegraph operator reported flight progress. These crews included Pilots Doc Johnson, Joe Hazen, Cliff Costa, Jesse Walton, and "Kickers" Andy Anderson (MSO-52/CIA), Tom Greiner (MSO-55/AFS), John Manley (CJ-62/AFS), **Karl Seethaler** (MSO-55/AFS), Cliff White (AFS), Jim Moran (AFS), Bob Herald (MSO-55/AFS), **Tom Butler** (MSO-61/AFS) and others.

As a result of the Geneva Accords, operations in Laos declined sharply in 1963. Air America's flying was restricted to just resupplying the Hmong. Employees were laid off and planes were taken out of service. Hanoi continued sending additional troops into Laos, expanding its area of control by attacking Hmong villages. The Kennedy administration authorized the CIA to increase the size of the Hmong army to 20,000.

In response to the Geneva Agreement, **Lee Gossett** (RDD-57) and Karl Seethaler (MSO-55) recall Air America flights out of "The Ranch" developed a technique to avoid treaty restraints. When a C-46 loaded with ammo departed "The Ranch", a duplicate C-46 scheduled for "local training" would depart Vientiane and go into a silent holding pattern in northern Laos. When "The Ranch" plane crossed



*LS-85 Phou Pha-Thi*

*(Courtesy Walt Darren)*



*AN-2 Russian Colt*

*(Courtesy Internet)*



into Lao air space, it transmitted a code word letting the duplicate plane know it was taking over its call sign. Now flying as the local training plane, it preceded to its airdrop destination. When “The Ranch” plane crossed the Mekong River back into Thailand, it sent another code letting the duplicate Vientiane plane know it could resume its call sign and return to Vientiane.

In March 1964, North Vietnamese and Pathet Lao forces attacked across the PDJ. Full-scale fighting broke out in Laos. A special circumstance existed in Laos. It was declared neutral, yet the US was engaged in military activities without a military commander. Although the CIA was responsible for conducting paramilitary operations, William Sullivan, US Ambassador to Laos, became the de facto military commander of the Secret War in Laos. All decisions were made by him in order to maintain the charade of observing the Geneva Accords and adhering to Lao neutrality.

In November 1964, Vientiane “Kickers” Gary Palmer and Frank Opel were flying out of “The Ranch” in a C-46 piloted by Jim Voyles and F/O Owen Jacobs. Their flight was to Phou Pha-Thi which is located near the Lao-North Vietnam border. At 5,800 feet it’s the highest peak in the region, with steep karst cliffs on all sides, permitting observation of a large area. The French used Pha-Thi for suppression of the Viet-Minh base at Sam Neua. When America replaced France after Dien Bien Phu, the CIA developed “Site-85” (Phou Pha-Thi) into a fortified stronghold.

On the first flight of two missions a day, Captain Voyles decided to let F/O Jacobs fly left seat to train and practice aerial drops. The cargo was ammo being dropped to a small garrison of Thai and Hmong

soldiers that had been under attack by the Pathet Lao. The drops were from about 400 feet above a helipad. Two pallets were dropped each pass.

They had made two passes and were preparing the load for the third drop. While Frank was untying the rope securing the next load, the right engine blew an oil line and then quit turning. While shutting down the engine and trying to regain control of the plane, a shout from the cockpit said, “Get the shit out!” Thinking it meant them, Frank immediately went running and, as he went out the door, shouted to Gary, “Jump!” Gary followed and their parachutes barely opened before slamming into deep brush alongside the helipad. Gary was greeted by one of the soldiers and asked if they came to help in the fight. Then a second soldier came down to the strip and told them that Edgar “Pop” Buell, Senior US-Aid official, was in the village and had invited them to come up to join him for lunch. They sipped on scotch while they waited for a flight to Na Khang (LS-36) and returned to Vientiane. In the meantime, Captain Voyles took over flying the plane while F/O Jacobs tried unsuccessfully to jettison the load. Fortunately, the loaded C-46 limped safely back to Vientiane on one engine.

**Postscript:** *In 1966-67 a radar control station was set up on the summit of Phou Pha Thi to direct USAF bombing raids over North Vietnam. The radar site was manned by 16 “sheep-dipped” USAF technicians operating a tactical air navigational aid and a sophisticated all-weather navigational device that controlled air attacks into North Vietnam. John “Woody” Spence (MYC-58) and Howard Freeman were the CIA case officers assigned to the site. “Site 85” became a unique story in aviation history on January 12, 1968, when as part of a preparatory phase of the Tet offensive, two*



SAT “Sanitized” 727

(Courtesy Stan Middleton)



Air America Beech Volpar

(Courtesy Bart Brigida)

*NVA 1946-vintage Antonov-2 “Russian Colt” biplanes attempted to destroy the radar site. When the attack began, an Air America Bell Huey Helicopter, piloted by Theodore Moore and crew chief Glenn Wood, was parked on the helipad. Moore and Wood sprinted from the CIA shack to the Huey and went after the “Colt” that had been hit by rifle fire from one of the Thai soldiers defending the site. After about a 20-mile chase, Wood fired his AK-47 at the crippled biplane, and it crashed into the mountainside in a ball of flame. Moore then spotted the second AN-2 and Wood shot it down about three miles from the first crash. On March 10, 1968, a midnight assault up the vertical karst by People’s Army of Vietnam (PAVN) commandos captured “Site 85”. Over 50 US, Thai, and Hmong were killed. Only four technicians escaped alive while 12 were killed or presumed dead. The following day the USAF bombed the site. Twenty days later President Johnson called a halt to the bombing of North Vietnam ending “Operation Rolling Thunder.” One Day Too Long by Timothy Castle clarifies this disaster at Site 85.*

The USAF F-105 “Thunderchief” or “Thud” fighter-bomber came to Takhli in 1965. It participated in the first airstrike of a gradual and sustained aerial bombardment campaign called “Rolling Thunder.” During the course of the war, 166 F-105s crashed across North Vietnam and Laos. From 1965 until 1971, Air America used two C-130s to fly 15-20 ton loads of munitions to Laos from “The Ranch” on a regular schedule.

The F-100 Super Sabres “Wild Weasel” aircraft came to Takhli in 1966. Using volunteer crews, the Wild Weasel concept was a method of countering the increasing North Vietnamese surface-to-air missile (SAM) threat. The mission was to eliminate SAM sites in North Vietnam. F-104 Starfighters also

flew more than 3,000 missions, including 12,000 sorties. The increase in fuel consumption required the KC-135 refueling tankers to come to Takhli until 1967. Recently it has been revealed that herbicide spraying missions also took place from Takhli in 1966. Agent Orange missions defoliated areas of the Ho Chi Minh Trail and had the approval of both the Thai and Laotian governments.

In March 1968 the “Combat Lancer” program brought six F-111A “Aardvarks,” new swing-wing, all-weather fighter-bombers, to Takhli. Three were lost the first month on 55 night missions against targets in North Vietnam: two to unknown causes and one to a manufacturing defect. Only a few aspects of the new aircraft worked as they were designed. The “Thunder Chiefs” from Korat replaced the three surviving F-111s. This move put all the “Thuds” in Southeast Asia at Takhli, where they stayed until December 1970.

In May 1968, I was scheduled to “The Ranch” for a special project. Ranch operations were always on a hush-hush, need-to-know basis. When hired by the CIA, all employees are required to sign a non-disclosure agreement. You promise not to reveal any information relating to “intelligence sources or methods” without first securing authorization. The slightest violation would compel threats of prosecution and severe consequences. No copy of this document was given to the employee. Clearance levels were granted for special ops as you were vetted.

At “The Ranch” details of the mission were given when you arrived on site. We were told that the training was for testing the feasibility of making aerial deliveries into Tibet. This highly secret project was the first of its kind. We were to drop cargo and jump out of a Southern Air Transport “sanitized”



*Royal Thai Air Base-Takhli 1965*

*(Courtesy USAF)*



*F-105 Thunderchief*

*(Courtesy Jim Asher)*



Boeing 727 jet. The tail number was the only marking on this stark aluminum plane.

The team included Lou Rucker (OSS/CIA), T.J. Thompson (MSO-55/CIA), Bob Herald (MSO-55/AFS), Fred Barnowski (MSO-42/CIA), Jack Manska (CIA), Bill Welk (727 pilot), Jim Rhyne (Volpar Turbo Beech pilot), **Johnny Kirkley** (CJ-64/AFS), **Billy Bowles** (RDD-57/AFS), and a couple other “Kickers.”

The passenger compartment of the 727 was fitted with roller conveyers to transport the cargo out the rear for drops. The rear stairwell was removed and retrofitted with stainless sheet metal to make a sliding board. The cargo was loaded in large cardboard boxes rigged with parachutes and tied to pallets atop the roller conveyers. The process of aerial delivery was the same as in other aircraft. The load to be dropped on each pass was untied and moved to the rear against a nylon strap. When the pilot gave the order to drop, the strap was cut and the load was pushed out the rear.

The cargo drops went without a hitch. Then we suited up for our parachute jump. We leveled off at 1200 feet. The cabin was depressurized, flaps were set at about 15°, the landing gear was lowered to create drag to maintain 150 knots, and the exit ramp was lowered. When we got over the jump spot, the pilot gave the signal and we slid out the rear of the plane. Compared to jumping out of a prop plane, there was no noise or prop blast. It was quiet and there was hardly a jerk when the static cord released. We floated down with the greatest of ease. Knowing what to expect, we were all excited to make a second jump. The tests went well and the project was approved and ready to go. However, the funding was cut and the 727 Tibet project was cancelled, much to our chagrin.

**Postscript:** *Fast forward to Monday morning, November 29, 1971. When I retired from Air America in August 1969, the “Call of the Wild” lured me to Alaska. I decided to put my University of Alabama Bachelor of Science business degree to use. I had just begun the second year of owning and operating the Polar Bar on East 5th Avenue in Anchorage. I was having a cup of coffee and talking with a customer when two suits walked through the door. They showed me their FBI badges and said they were investigating a Northwest Airline Boeing 727 skyjacking on the night before Thanksgiving. They knew I had jumped out of a 727 with Air America and wanted to ask me a few questions. Since their statement was correct, I assumed they had been talking to the CIA. First, they wanted to know where I was on Wednesday night. When I explained I was working the bar they showed me a drawing of Dan Cooper, asking if I knew him. I said it did resemble **Lou Banta** (CJ-51), a smokejumper I had worked with at Air America, but he wasn't on the 727 jump project in Thailand. As a coincidence, Louie happened to live in Oregon not far from where Cooper supposedly exited the plane. However, after being investigated, Banta was exonerated. We had a good laugh in Portland at the 2008 Air America Reunion. D.B. Cooper became a cult hero and remains the only unsolved skyjacking in American aviation history. In past years a standing joke at Smokejumper and Air America reunions was, “D.B. Cooper Lives!”*

When President Johnson revealed the existence of a new reconnaissance aircraft, he called it SR-71 instead of RS-71, “Reconnaissance Strike.” Thus, the name was changed to “Strategic Reconnaissance” to explain SR-71. Concern for the viability of the U-2 led to the establishment of “Project Oxcart.” Reportedly flying out of Takhli in 1968, as part of



C-130 #605 Departing Takhli

(Courtesy Ken McClintick)



C-130 #605 Crash Phou Bia

(Courtesy Gene Hasenfus)

“Oxcart” was the USAF dual-seat SR-71 and the CIA single-seat A-12. Keeping the CIA’s extensive role in “Oxcart” secret wasn’t easy; therefore, these missions rotated from Kadena to Takhli. The USAF SR-71 missions were separated from the CIA A-12 missions of “Oxcart.” The A-12 traveled speed of sound, Mach 3.1 (2,378 m.p.h.), at 84,000 feet. A two-pass mission over Vietnam took 21 ½ minutes.

On April 10, 1970, two C-130As were making trips from “The Ranch” to Long Tieng (LS-20A) carrying fuel and munitions. AFS Dan Gamelin recalled he was flying with Captain Don Wharton and Kicker Cliff White in the second C-130. They were departing LS-20A, after making their first trip, when someone in the cockpit was wondering why the first C-130, on its second trip, was so far off to the east. When they picked up their second load at “The Ranch” and headed back to Long Tieng, they were informed that the first C-130 had not landed at LS-20A and Air America aircraft were searching the area. Later it was discovered that aircraft #605 crashed into Laos’ highest peak (9,250 feet), Phou Bia. The Air America crew included Captain Kevin Cochrane, F/O Huey Rogers, Navigator Roger McKean, Flight Engineer Milton Smart, Air Freight Specialists Gerald De Long and **Billy Hester** (MSO-58). They all perished in the crash.

During the rainy season of 1970, three Vientiane-based Air America C-123’s reported to “The Ranch” for a special operation. Upon arrival the crews were told that new chemical slurry had been developed to make roadways more slippery. This was top secret because the CIA didn’t want environmentalists getting involved. The mission was to drop this powdered slurry on the Ho Chi Minh trail to create erosion in hopes of interrupting the supply route. Captain Ray Jeffery, Kickers **Cliff Hamilton** (CJ-62)

and **Ed Weissenback** (CJ-64) were in the lead plane. Captains of the second and third planes were Dick Jones and Frank Renigar. The slurry was in burlap bags on pallets, and the entire load was jettisoned on one pass at about 1,000 feet above the trail by all three planes. Hamilton said they were surprised that when the loads exited, the bags had not been tied to the pallets. As the load went out the back, the pallets went spinning off in all directions above and below the second C-123, just missing it. Then bullets started hitting their plane near Weissenback as they climbed out of the drop. All three planes safely returned to Vientiane.

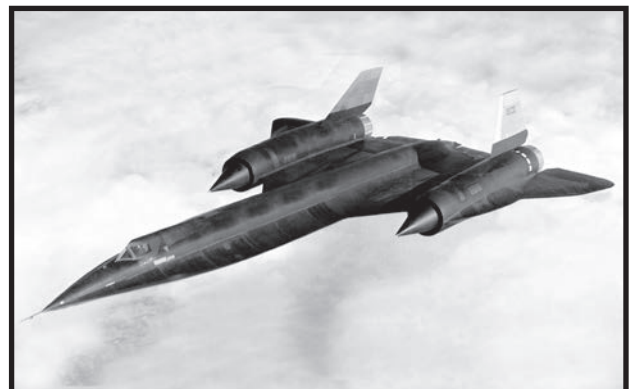
**Postscript:** *AFS Ed Weissenback, Captain George Ritter, F/O Roy Townley and Air Freight Dispatcher Kh-amphanh Saysongkham weren’t as fortunate on December 27, 1971. Their C-123 #293 went missing in route to Xieng Lom loaded with 75mm, 81mm, and white phosphorous smoke rounds. Xieng Lom was near Route 46, (China Road) guarded by 400 antiaircraft guns.*

*On January 15, 1972, while dropping reward leaflets for information on the missing #293, Volpar 71C was hit by a 100mm antiaircraft round. Bob Main piloted while Jim Rhyne and Bobby Herald (MSO-55) threw leaflets out the cabin door. Herald recalled hearing six shells go off tracking them before an explosion hit under Rhyne blowing his right shoe (foot enclosed) across the cabin. The Volpar received severe damage with multiple holes, revealing wires and cables. After checking to see if Main was okay, Herald returned to attend to Rhyne. His leg artery was exposed pumping blood with each heartbeat. Herald pinched the artery between his thumb and finger while Main did a masterful job flying the heavily damaged aircraft to Udorn. Although Rhyne lost part of his leg, he returned as Fixed Wing Chief Pilot. All efforts to find #293 were unsuccessful. The crash site was not located until 1997. The*



U-2

(Courtesy USAF)



A-12

(Courtesy USAF)



site was excavated three times in 2017-18. Remains of Ritter, Townley and Weissenback were all identified through DNA.

On October 6, 1970, an airstrike in Laos was the last F-105 combat mission of the war. All USAF personnel left Takhli in April 1971.

In March 1972 when North Vietnam launched its Spring Offensive invasion of South Vietnam, the USAF responded by launching Operation Linebacker. This began the first sustained bombing of North Vietnam since November 1968. Takhli was reopened with 72 F-4D Phantom IIs. The move included more than 4,000 personnel and 1,600 tons of cargo. In addition, several AC-130 gunships were deployed to Takhli from Ubon. In November 50 F-111s came back to Takhli and started a bombing campaign on the Plaine des Jarres (PDJ) in Laos.

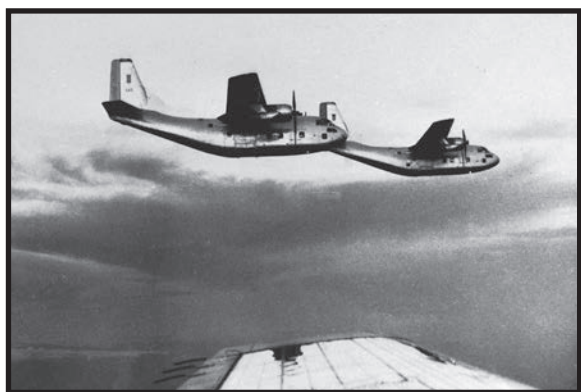
With the resumption of peace negotiations, the bombing in Laos and North Vietnam was suspended. By the signing of the cease-fire agreement in Laos, February 1973, Air America started a pullout. All operations, both flying and maintenance, were completely terminated on June 3, 1974. Operations at Takhli and "The Ranch" were finished when the base was officially returned to the Thai government on September 12, 1974.

Air America's ending was as convoluted as CAT's beginning. Basically, the loss of South Vietnam in April 1975 prompted the CIA to finish the orderly phase out of the entire CAT-Air America complex (The Pacific Corporation, Air America Inc., Air Asia Co Ltd, CATCL, and Air America Ltd.). The dissolution was completed in April 1976. Assets were estimated to be \$25 million. A CIA check for \$20 million was made out to the U.S. Treasury. The CIA for contingent liabilities retained the remainder. CIA bureaucrats denied the existence of Air America

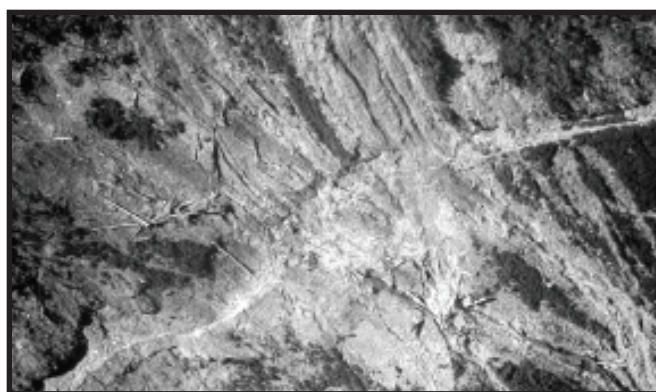
for years and accident reports were stonewalled. The employees were released unceremoniously without any retirement subsidies. Meager benefits were only given to families of employees killed in action and those who suffered long-term disabilities.

"The Ranch" was a beehive of activity during the Vietnam War. A rivalry existed between Air America and the USAF regarding Search and Rescue (SAR) work in Laos with both parties saying "that is our turf." Yet, the USAF, CIA, and Thai government worked closely to become the vanguard of special air warfare and covert operations during the Vietnam War.

For the most part, there were two reasons why the war in Laos was kept secret until the Vietnam War was over. First, the Thai government didn't want the US presence to draw attention to their air bases; little government information was made public until years after the war. Second, there was camaraderie among Air America crews. Keeping secrets was not a problem. Evidence from past wars has shown that under torture everybody talks, the debate being how reliable is the information garnered. If you were on a particular mission, you knew. If not, you didn't need to know. If captured, the less you knew, the better it was for all concerned. Social drinking was a response to the trauma of flying in a war zone. Off hours were spent partying in bars and pursuing careless romances; however we were loyal and committed not to jeopardize our job with loose talk. Air America's daily flights could be unpredictable, hazardous and at times excursions traversing the narrow bridge of fate between life and sudden death. Purportedly, 186 Air America flight crewmen were killed in action from 1960 to 1975. Still, we embraced the excitement of working and living in an exotic land on the cusp of calamity. 🍷



*C-123's On Chemical Slurry Drop (Courtesy Ray Jeffries)*



*Slurry Erosion Ho Chi Minh Trail (Courtesy Stan Pelzinsky)*



## CIA Smokejumpers Killed In Action

*Photos Courtesy NSA Archives*



Darrell Eubanks (8-13-61)



Dave Bevan (8-13-61)



John Lewis (8-13-61)



Gideon Newton (7-17-63)



Eugene DeBruin (MIA 9-5-63)



Billy Hester (4-10-70)



Ed Weissenback (12-27-71)



Frank Odom (4-5-77)



Jerry Daniels (4-28-82)

Not Shown  
Tom Dieffenbach (7-23-62)

*Rest In Peace*

*Layout Design: Johnny Kirkley (CJ-64)*





# SOUNDING OFF from the Editor



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

ONE OF MY goals over the past few years has been to get as much smokejumper history recorded as possible. Then, have all that information available on the internet for anyone in future years to read and reference. A key factor in this process is to house all information at a place that has the best chance to exist years from now. We do not know if the NSA will exist 20 years from now. We are dying off at a higher rate than there are new smokejumpers entering the profession.

Just over three years ago, we established a working relationship with Eastern Washington University in Cheney, Washington. **Stan Collins** (MYC-67) is coordinating this project. I am very appreciative of his work.

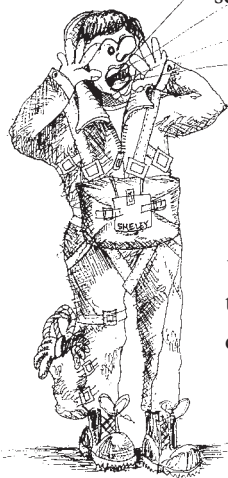
I've been involved in the NSA since 1996 and it has been one of the most rewarding experiences

of my life. I feel like I personally know close to 1,000 of you—maybe I have not met you face-to-face, but I've typed and updated your information in the database many times.

Recently, Fred Cooper, Jim Cherry, Pferron Doss, Jim Damitio and I have researched information on the "Pioneer Smokejumpers." The 1941 jumpers are featured in this issue. We now have obits/bios on just about every jumper 1940-47. At this point the numbers and research time is becoming overwhelming. I'm going to come up with a new plan in 2021.

I just finished working 505 obits obtained over the internet. The foundation of any organization, job, or profession is made up of the people who did the job. By recording personal information, future generations will know the characteristics that make up a smokejumper. We now have well over 1,000 obits on the NSA website. If you want some really interesting reading, spend some time with each one of these people.

Before the advent of the "permanent" smokejumper, what were the characteristics and facts that I've found in my research? The majority of these men re-



searched, no women in the obits yet, rookieed before 1980.

Most jumped for a few seasons while they obtained their education. The percentage of university degrees is in the 90% range. When they went out into the "real world," they were lawyers, teachers, doctors, military, business men, and a large number spent their total career with the USFS. The University of Montana Forestry Program supplied many of these individuals and

they rose into leadership positions with the Forest Service.

There were common threads that connected most of these men. Love of the outdoors—hunting, fishing, hiking, and camping. Many were involved in establishing conservation groups so that resources will be there for the next generation. Another was the level of success they achieved. Individuals did not just go into a profession they were successful and advanced up the ladder.

One of the areas that I found to be consistent, and that I really appreciate, was involvement in their community—school boards, city councils, churches, and a number of organizations that helped their communities. They were not satisfied with just living in a community, they wanted to contribute to the improvement of their community.

We know that to be a smokejumper you have to be physically

fit. That characteristic did not end with their smokejumping career, it continued into later life, and in some cases, right up to their passing. Running marathons, skiing, hiking, and outdoor activities were evident.

Among the newspaper information reviewed and updated were a good number of individuals who were listed as being smokejumpers in their obits but were not. I guess we can take that as a compliment.

Congratulations ladies and gentlemen for being part of one of the most unique groups in the country. I will be contacting you in 2021 to get your biography information to preserve for history. 🧑🏻

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## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

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Dear Editor:

I enjoyed reading **Dave Mutch's** (GAC-54) article on wilderness fire firsts (*Smokejumper* Jan. 2021). Dave is well respected as one of the fathers of modern day wilderness fire management. His story brought back memories of several fires we managed and the emotional trauma we faced as we followed his trail.

The Alpine Lakes Fire was 15,000 acres, blowing and going on the Wind River Indian Reservation Roadless Area. Four of us managing the fire kept telling ourselves, "We are doing the right thing." Pause, gut check, look at massive convection column. Look at each other. "We are doing the right thing, aren't we?" Pause. "Yes, we are doing the right thing." Sinking feeling, nerves on edge. Thinking, "Let's just keep telling ourselves we are doing the right thing." Thirty thousand acres later (46,000 acres total), a sigh of relief. "Yes, we did the right thing, but do we want to do it again?" Maybe in a couple of years?

Bob mentioned Elers Koch, a founding father of American Forestry. Bob's reference is to the 1935 article published in the Journal of Forestry (Society of American Foresters) entitled *The Passing of the Lolo Trail*. In the article Koch outlines a zone idea of fire management. Control in the front country. Natural fire allowed to burn in the back country and a transition zone of a multitude of management actions. The article can be found in the book *Forty Years a Forester* by Elers Koch. I might simply state that this book is a must read.

I still say that the Wilderness Act must be modified to allow for "cultural fires as ignited by American Indians." Fire managers could ignite fire at the right time and place to reduce the risk of escape, re-introduce fire, and enhance the wilderness resource and provide for the longevity of the fire manager, both in job position and personal health and life expectancy. Thank you, Bob, for an outstanding article.

—Karl Brauneis (MSO-77) 🧑🏻

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## Family

by Mark Corbet (La Grande '74)

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**T**ucked away in the northeastern corner of Oregon is a large circular valley of exceptionally good farmland that is surrounded by forest covered mountains. It is called the Grande Rhonde, French words meaning "great round," likely a name used by early French trappers. During the years I lived in that valley, the community airport hosted a Forest Service facility

consisting of a Regional Fire Cache, Air Tanker Base, Smokejumper Base, and a Hotshot Crew.

The manager of the center, a onetime Redding Smokejumper, ruled with an iron hand, demanding that everyone employed there, from firefighters to administrative staff, do their part to keep the place clean and orderly. There was a broom or mop for everyone, and everyone used them on a



regular basis. He could frequently be heard over the facility PA system, a loud voice from on high, pointing out something that needed to be taken care of or put in order at the center.

Until you got to know him, this manager seemed like a gruff sort of guy who cared little for the people who worked there, seeing them only as bodies to be sent to jobs that needed attention. You had to be around him for a season or more to begin to see his true colors. Granted, he demanded high standards of cleanliness and expected everyone to keep busy when no fires were burning, but he did care a great deal for the people who worked for him. Those of us who worked there for a long time came to call him Uncle Lee, and we knew he was always looking out for our safety, our jobs, and our families.

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Uncle Lee, and we knew he was  
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As is often seen with persons in leadership roles, there was always a kind of invisible wall between him and all who worked at the facility. His office was located on the second floor of the building where we worked and right next door to the fire dispatch office. From his big second story office window, he could see most of the airport and the entire east side of that big round valley, his view extending on up past the foothills to the timber-covered mountains beyond.

One fall day during deer season, Kurt and I jumped a fire high up on one of those forested ridges that were visible from Lee's window. We were perhaps two thousand feet higher than the airport but no more than fifteen miles away. Our fire turned out to be three small warming fires, and each had an unobstructed view out across the Grande Ronde Valley.

After roughly lining each of the fires and searching for any others in the area, we made our first call to dispatch to report on our fires and pass along an estimate of how long we expected to be there.

I don't know if Uncle Lee just happened to be

passing by dispatch at the time we called in or was there at that particular time, but it was his voice that replied when we called. I suspect he simply couldn't resist the urge to let us know that even though we were out in the forest, he was still keeping an eye on us and we better not be getting any rest time in on his watch.

Kurt and I weren't surprised to hear his voice blare out from our handheld radio but were surprised when he said, "And don't forget, I can see you two up there." We both rolled our eyes, and Kurt, always one with a good comeback, yelled out as I keyed my radio, "Ask him which two fingers I am holding up?" I looked over at Kurt knowing his words had just been sent out for everyone on the entire forest to hear. Most could easily guess which two fingers he was referring to. If Kurt's words had in fact gone out over the air, we were probably going to be in trouble when we got back. We started laughing so hard we had to sit down before we fell down.

Dreading our arrival back at the air center, I imagined being called into his office for a serious talk. When we finally got back to the jump base and started unloading our equipment, I stole a glance up at Uncle Lee's second floor window and could see him standing up there stone-faced with his hands clasped behind his back as he watched us unload our gear. It looked like we might be in his office for a long time.

As we finished unpacking our jump gear and made it ready for the next fire call, the PA system remained quiet. Was he just letting us twist in the wind for a bit before the hammer fell or had he not heard what was said?

Much to our relief, a call to his office never materialized!

We never found out for sure if Uncle Lee had heard what Kurt said but I like to think he did. If so, I hope he was alone in the dispatch office so he could crack a smile or maybe even laugh a little to himself. If he wasn't alone, then I would lay odds that he held back any reaction until he could go back to his office, thereby maintaining his persona as the iron-handed ruler. Then he would shake his head and think about the wild, unruly bunch he had been tasked with keeping in line. But, over time, he had come to look upon them as his family. 🙏

# Smokejumper “Flips”

by Lee “Hardrock” Jensen (McCall '69)

*Dick Rath (MSO-73): I first came into contact with this story and others through Ken Stump, DFMO from the Nez Perce. Several years ago, Ken sent me a series of humorous stories written by Lee Jensen. Once you finish reading the first story, I am willing to bet that you will be looking with anticipation to reading more of Lee's work.*

There have been a few books written about the heroics of the airborne firefighters. Good books, most of them, describing the uniqueness of the job, the special comradery that was forged over the course of a summer while working and recreating together and, of course, some of the memorable fires that the particular author had been on. But none of them really gave the reader a good look at one of the smokejumper's testing and bonding rituals, the smokejumper's “Heads out Flip.”

The Flip was the impartial, unbribable, decision maker in damn near every aspect of the jumper's summer life. Everything from who was going to provide the entertainment to who was going to handle the shitter detail.

The Flip, if analyzed with psychological insight, was a bonding agent. Big or small egos were invariably crushed to a point lower than whale shit sometime during the course of the summer. This created a bonding of sorts as in “birds of a feather,” or zero egos supported zero egos.

In another way, it was also a test of an individual's character. You could assume that if a guy fulfilled his losing obligation, you could trust him to be there when the going got rough. It created a bonding effect to the crew. It wasn't, however, this current trendy male bonding of hands-on huggy stuff.

The essences of the Flip were simple. Each individual would flip a coin. If it came up heads, he was out of the game. If more than one individual flipped a tail, another round would begin and continue until there was one person left. That yardbird was either the winner or loser depending on the rules that instigated the Flip.

Outwardly, the flipping ritual sounds simple. Flip a coin, heads you're out, tails you're in. But with closer examination you would find a cornucopia of intrigues and superstitions.

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  - Silver City
- Tom Carlsen Film on Smokejumping (1939)
- Triple Nickle Photographs from the National Archives



Quarters were the preferred flippers. They had the right heft and were generally thought to have the favorable karma. Pennies were considered the coin of death. A jumper with only pennies in his pocket was considered a loser even before the Flip started. He would constantly be reminded of this throughout the duration of the Flip. These friendly reminders help the poor unfortunate heighten his clutch factor.

Veterans of the Flip were constantly testing home-grown theories of relativity. Coin velocity, flip height, wind direction, land surface texture, and other variables were constantly interpolated with Einsteinian intenseness. Coins that had a bad run were immediately given away to a jump partner. If these good friends refused to accept the gift, the coin was profanely cursed and disposed of in the pop machine.

Many flip propositions were used over and over again. Others were so ugly they could only be used once. One Flip that was used with great regularity was the "rock and rope." The rock and rope Flip could be used on about any project that required movement over a lot of country, such as tree planting.

Pretty much, without exception, a tree planting smokejumper is starting to get bored with the whole planting detail right after his first tree is poked into the ground. More occasionally, the second he steps off the project bus. His brainbox shifts from job quality to on-the-job entertainment. And pretty much, without exception, damn near all jumpers had the gawddamnest perverse imagination for entertainment.

The rock and rope could be used on a daily basis after the first minute of the first day. This Flip doesn't really produce a lot of immediate high excitement, but rather long and sustained entertainment. This Flip was used on a lot of planting details since there always seemed to be an overabundance of rocks on the planting sites.

A rock, never less than 20 pounds and more than 50, is snugly hitched to a rope and then hitched to the loser's ankle. Just like the old ball and chain. Just like a pup on a leash, it wants to go there when you want to go here. None of them were ever leash broke, not at the beginning of the day nor at the end of the day.

The length of time was specified right at the

beginning of the Flip and usually fluctuated according to the mood of the crew, which was directly influenced by the length of time spent on the project.

This rock and rope deal doesn't produce lots of immediate hoo-hawing, but over the duration of the poor bastard's sentence, the rest of the crew gets in a lot of snickering, watching the sorry, raggedy-assed hero drag that rock around. Up slope, down slope, cross slope, and through the obstacle course of leftover slash.

With skewed pleasure, the crew gets their morale boosted every time they glance over at the loser of the Flip. Yeah, they're on a shitter detail alright, but look at that poor guy. He's on the same detail and got a gawddam rock hitched to his ankle. Life was considered wonderful when you could heap some misery on a friend. It was to be expected that someone on the crew will frequently remind our hero to maintain his share of the planting. Tie a rock to a guy's ankle and he turns into a slacker. 🙄

*Lee died June 17, 2009, at his home in Lake Fork, Idaho. He had a 39-year career with the U.S. Forest Service and jumped at McCall 1969-76. After jumping, Lee became the Assistant FMO at the Big Creek Ranger Station and retired in the same capacity on the Krassel Ranger District. Lee spent 37 years on the Payette Ski Patrol and was awarded a Purple Star for saving a life in 2006.*

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To request email delivery contact Editor **Chuck Sheley** (CJ-59) [cnkgsheley@earthlink.net](mailto:cnkgsheley@earthlink.net).

net. 🙄

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# DICK JOHNSON—THE BEST MOUNTAIN PILOT IN THE COUNTRY

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*The following is taken from the notes and letters of George “Hade” Robinson (MSO-44). Hade was member of the Civilian Public Service (conscientious objectors) smokejumpers and jumped the 1944-45 seasons. The CPS men kept the smokejumper program alive during WWII. At that time there were smokejumpers at Missoula, McCall and Cave Junction. There were times when the Cave Junction jumpers were transported and dropped by military aircraft. This is an interesting bit of history from Hade and a tribute to the mountain pilots of the Johnson Flying Service. (Ed.)*

SEPTEMBER 1944—Vic Carter came in and said a call had come in from Washington for eight jumpers. We took off at 0500 for Winthrop with Dick Johnson flying us in the Trimotor. He is really a flyer. He has the reputation of being the best mountain pilot in the country and on this trip, he really built it up more.

We landed at Winthrop at 0830 and put our jumpsuit on. This was something new for this region and some of the Forest Service big wigs had to go up with us. There were enough of them that we had to leave our cargo for a second trip. The fire was about 20 miles from Lake Chelan—some of the roughest country I’ve seen. We skimmed through a canyon with, what I thought, was about five feet between the wing and a rock cliff. Another was so narrow that Dick kicked the plane on its side and flew through that way. *(Hade goes on to describe the jump, but we will bounce forward to where they are on the ground. Ed.)*

Ten fellows from Cave Junction arrived to jump from a Navy DC-3. The pilot had said that he could fly anywhere Johnson could get into with the old Ford, but when he saw the terrain, he changed his mind. A

newspaper reporter and photographer on the plane said beads of sweat stood out on his face when he dropped the cargo a thousand feet above the fire.

Johnson came back with our cargo a few minutes later and hit the treetops with his wheels when he dropped it. Then he dropped four thousand feet into the canyon to drop a fire camp at the base of the fire for 80 walk-in firefighters from the Howe Sound Mining Co. When the captain of the Navy plane saw that, he turned white as a sheet and headed for home.

The 18 of us jumpers worked for two days and finally got a line across the head and flank of the fire. The next day, the miners got a line across the bottom. We had it almost licked. 🔦

*To paraphrase Hal Samsel (MSO-49) from a prior story in Smokejumper: “Most of those boys (CPS) were farmers from the midwest and were used to working from before sunup to after dark. Once those guys put their head down, they didn’t look up. They had never heard of the eight-hour workday.”*



*As fires ravaged Northern Calif. last Oct., Jim Klump (RDD-64), inventor of the Klump Pump, posted this pre-election sign outside his mountain home. (Courtesy Sandy Martinez)*



# Dry Lakes A Fire Use Event—Good Results

by Dick Rath (Missoula '73)

**D**uring the winter of 2001, I was approached by Rich Lasko, the Rx Fire Assistant Director in the Regional Office. He asked me if I would be interested in becoming the Incident Commander (IC) on one of the Region's Fire Use Management Teams.

I jumped at the offer for two reasons. The first is that for over thirty years I had been on crews and overhead teams that fought to corral and suppress wildland fires across the US. Over time, I had witnessed how easy it was to spend a great deal of money and accomplish very little. The cost of fire suppression had continued to rise, and I could not see an end to it.

The second is that since the White Cap Fire use area had proved a success, I figured that allowing fires to burn within a Wilderness Complex could be a way of breaking new ground for the FS. By this time, all of the large wilderness complexes and several National Parks had approved plans.

During the next three years, our team found plenty of work. The team was comprised of many skill sets. At first I thought it was going to be difficult to fill these positions. I quickly found out that there were other fire persons who were ready to stop spending large sums of money and try something different.

The following takes place on the Gila NF where less than sixteen years earlier, all fires were being suppressed.

In June 2003, we received an order from the Gila NF to manage the Dry Lake Fire.

When we arrived, the local fire staff told me that others on the forest were not convinced to allow this fire to be managed as a Prescribed Natural Fire.

On our first day, I was in a meeting with the Staff Officers and thought that I was going to witness a fistfight between the Fire Staff and Recreation Staff. It was brought to my attention

that the Golden Gila Trout, one of the first listed Threatened and Endangered Species, had prime habitat within the area of the fire.

We began to settle in, I established a decent relationship with the Forest Supervisor and her staff. We filled a number of positions with personnel from the Gila and we slowly became accepted.

During the following two weeks, we developed a plan that would move a small group of fisheries personnel ahead of the fire. They would shock the fish and remove them via helicopter to a local fish hatchery. This was completed without a hitch. There were other complexities that dealt with grazing, two other endangered species, and an overall skepticism of fire use.

Over the next six weeks, several other Fire Use Teams rotated in and did a fine management job. Toward the end of July, the Northern Rockies Team rotated back to finish this project.

The fire continued to burn during the summer and when the monsoons arrived, over 109,000 acres had burned. The Fisheries personnel were still not convinced that the Golden Gila Trout habitat was not adversely affected. The winter of 2003-04 brought heavy snow, and the following spring, due to the fire, new channels and pools were cut giving the trout new rearing pools and more water to thrive in. In the spring of 2004, the Gila Forest Supervisor received a National Award for having the largest successful fire use event in the system. This fire use event sustained a natural fishery on the landscape for less than the \$20.00 acre.

In retrospect there is little doubt that our success was due to the skill set of each team member. They worked extremely well together, and the joint decisions they made were based on their experiences and not their egos. One day I tallied up the fire experience of the team. It totaled well over two hundred and fifty years. I was a very lucky IC to have been part of that team. 🌲

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# Shaky Acres Montana

by **Chuck Sundstrom** (Missoula '57)

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**V**ery few people know that a small number of smokejumpers (five at first) played an important part in the 1959 earthquake rescue operation at West Yellowstone, Montana. As time went on, another eight jumpers from Missoula were dispatched, as was a helicopter and a DC3 from the Johnson Flying Service (JFS). At least two other jumpers were dispatched to Ennis, Montana, to help count the numbers of these who were injured or died in the earthquake.

At 11:37 p.m. on Monday, August 17, 1959, one of the severest earthquakes recorded on the North American continent shook the West Yellowstone area and sent a gigantic tidal wave down the length of the existing Hebgen Lake. Scientists have calculated the earthquake magnitude at 7.2. Seismologists now think that the quake may have been a "reservoir induced earthquake," triggered by the impoundment of Hebgen Lake behind a dam that was built 54 years earlier. The Hebgen Lake earthquake was the sixth-largest earthquake recorded in the United States outside of California, Alaska and Hawaii. Rockslides buried a campground full of summer travelers and, by the time the shaking had stopped, at least 28 people were dead and a

large number of people were injured.

Five smokejumpers were stationed at West Yellowstone when the quake happened: **Jim Manion** (MSO-54), **Ed Courtney** (MSO-58), **Bob Wilson** (MSO-57), **Dick Austin** (GAC-53), **Chuck Sundstrom** (MSO-57) and Pilot **Ralph Renseck**. Squadleader **Jim Manion** advised us to immediately report to the West Yellowstone Airport and open our fire cache in case first aid equipment would be needed. We did not have much in the way of first aid equipment, but we made do with what we had.

At midnight of Aug. 17, we had no idea of how many people were injured or where they were. By morning, we knew we had an emergency on our hands. West Yellowstone Park Ranger **Joe Frazer** informed us at about 1:00 a.m. that he had reports that some people were injured and possibly trapped in the park near Madison Junction. **Joe** requested me and **Ed Courtney** to accompany him to Madison Junction. We did so but after three hours searching, we found no injuries but lots of scared campers, so we returned to the airport.

By 7:00 a.m. (Tuesday, Aug. 18), we were beginning to receive reliable reports of many injuries below Hebgen

Dam near a forest service campground on the Beaverhead National Forest. We could not access the area since all the roads leading into or out of West Yellowstone were closed due to rockslides and road damage.

The Yellowstone Park people, at the suggestion of **Jim Manion**, called for assistance from the Missoula Smokejumper Base. **Al Hammond** (MSO-46) dispatched a DC-2 with eight jumpers (including himself) and rescue equipment. **Al** also arranged for Johnson Flying Service to dispatch a helicopter and a DC-3 for transporting injured from the quake site. The jumpers arrived at about 10:30 the morning of Tuesday, Aug. 18, with **Joe Roemer** (MSO-52) and **Randy Hurst** (MSO-54) as spotters. The jumpers were **Al Hammond** (MSO-46), **Roland Andersen** (MSO-52), **Jim Burleigh** (MSO-58), **Lowell Hanson** (MSO-58), **John McLaughlin** (MSO-59), **Bob Nicol** (MSO-52), **Pat Scheid** (MSO-58), and **Dick Tracy** (MSO-53).

The jumpers found a jump spot north of the campground to begin rescue operations. Looking back on this, it is now apparent how dangerous this jump site was since rocks were still falling and the whole area was very unstable. However,



the injured needed help and that was the closest spot to the campground.

The Johnson Flying Service used their helicopter to transport injured from the quake site to the highway below where the Montana Highway Patrol transported them to Ennis, 35 miles to the north. The helicopter also transported injured to the West Yellowstone Airport where the DC-3 flew them to the hospital in Bozeman.

Military aircraft, including fixed wing and helicopters, began arriving in the early afternoon. The five jumpers at West Yellowstone got very busy when the injured began to arrive at their little base. We had a large number of injured to care for. The only "cots" we had were bales of hay that were stored in our hanger.

Jim Manion asked me to assist one of the first of the injured. I held her hand and she was given plasma. She was badly injured. I tried to console her, and she tried to tell me something, but I could not understand her. She was airlifted to Bozeman by our West Yellowstone smokejumper plane late that afternoon. I learned later that she died in the Deaconess Hospital in Bozeman.

Injured people that the Missoula jumpers could locate were airlifted by helicopter and brought to our makeshift first aid station. They were then placed into fixed wing aircraft and flown to Bozeman or Ogden.

We were swamped, but with the help from Johnson Flying Service and the military, we transported all the injured to nearby hospitals. **Fred Brauer** (MSO-41), assisted by Ennis District personnel, organized rescue efforts from the Ennis area, but mostly tried to determine how many people were injured and who were still missing. All in all, I don't know how many people were saved, but estimates ran as high as over 100. We were advised later that the death toll was at least 28. No telling how many people were still buried under the rock and rubble that fell on the campground.

I was especially impressed

by the Missoula jumpers who jumped onto that rock slope north of the slide area and JFS for their helicopter and skill in maneuvering around those rockslides. They did a remarkable job under those circumstances. Much credit is also given to the military, who did a fantastic job. We were all quite busy for at least 72 hours. It is remarkable that nobody who aided in the rescue operation got hurt.

By the morning of August 22, 1959, the rescue operation was beginning to shut down. The ground around West Yellowstone, however, shook for several more months. We renamed the quake area "Shaky Acres Montana." 🌲

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## NEW NSA LIFE MEMBERS SINCE APRIL 2020

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### *Thanks for your support!*

385	WEHKING	LEONARD	FAIRBANKS	1985
386	BUCKLEW	DOUG	CAVE JUNCTION	1967
387	KRENKEL	RICHARD	MISSOULA	1971
388	BLANTON	CHUCK	MCCALL	1947
389	DURTSCHI	MIKE	FAIRBANKS	1979
390	DURTSCHI	JIM	FAIRBANKS	1982
391	FREDENBURG	MILT	MISSOULA	1967
392	ARNDT	BOB	MISSOULA	1965
393	EMRY	DAN	BOISE	1978
394	BEEM	RUSS	CAVE JUNCTION	1959
395	DIFANI	PHILIP	MISSOULA	1967
396	CORBET	MARK	LA GRANDE	1974
397	DUDDLESTON	PETER	MCCALL	1983
398	SIPLE	RON	MCCALL	1953
399	CAYOU	JOE	MISSOULA	1959
400	DECKER	TOM	IDAHO CITY	1964
401	MONTOYA	BOBBY	IDAHO CITY	1962
402	STEVENSON	VERN	REDDING	1962
403	NELSON	HAL	MISSOULA	1960
404	RAGEN	MIKE	MISSOULA	1967
405	HICKS	CECIL	NO CASCADES	1962
406	BOECK	MIKE	IDAHO CITY	1969
407	SIMONSEN	STEEN	MISSOULA	1991
408	HILDNER	RICHARD	MISSOULA	1967
409	HARTZELL	KARL	BOISE	1970

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# RECORDING SMOKEJUMPER HISTORY



## 1941 Rookies—The Pioneers NSA History Preservation Project

### Roy A. Abbott (Missoula '41)

Roy died of natural causes November 11, 1986, in Clarkston, WA. He was born in Grouse, Washington, about 1908-10. He was orphaned by the age of six and lived with his widowed grandmother. As a young man, he worked as a printer according to the 1930 census. Roy, at age 33, was in the second group of smokejumpers trained and jumped for only one season. He had a single fire jump, the Dean Creek Fire on August 8<sup>th</sup> and broke his leg according to Jim "Smokey" Alexander (MSO-40) in an interview with *Smokejumper* magazine in 2004.

Roy enlisted in the Army in February 1942 and began training at Ft. Benning, GA, with the Parachute Battalion. Roy was discharged in March 1945 and married in Seattle a week later. He settled in the Lewiston/Clarkston area and is buried at the Lewis-Clark Memorial Gardens in Lewiston, ID.

### Fred O. Brauer (Missoula '41)

Fred died June 25, 2007. He was born August 23, 1917, in Butte, Montana, and attended Bonner School and then Missoula County High School, graduating in 1937. Fred then went on to the University of Montana, where he played football for the Grizzlies from 1937 to 1940. He joined the smokejumpers in 1941 at age 23 and, during a slow season, had a single fire jump. Fred was a squadleader during the 1942 season at Seeley Lake.

Fred then joined the Army Air Corp as a pilot and flew C-46s and C-47s in the European Theater where he was awarded the distinguished flying cross.

When the Smokejumper Center in Missoula

was dedicated in 1954, he was selected to welcome President Eisenhower and present him with a painting of a Ford Trimotor, a jump helmet, and T-shirts for his grandchildren. During the day he had the opportunity to talk to the President and mention his role with the 439th Troop Carrier Group in WWII.

Fred returned from the war and entered a career that would make him a smokejumping legend. He was responsible for training the new recruits and often referred to the trainees as "my boys." Many of the recruits referred to Fred jokingly as "Good Deal" Brauer.

By 1950 he had been appointed the Director of Personnel at Missoula, where he remained until 1958 when he became Assistant Air Officer in charge of Retardant and Helicopter projects. He decided in 1960 to learn to pilot helicopters and transferred to Equipment and Development as Air Development Officer at the San Dimas, California, Development Center. He returned to Missoula in 1963 and built the Lolo View Manor mobile home park.

Fred was one of the true pioneers of smokejumping and made several appearances on the History Channel and various other documentaries. He was the second member of the National Smokejumper Association.

In 2002, Fred wrote that he still hears from many of his boys as far back as 1941-42. "We had the best firefighting organization that the Forest Service ever had. Many of the boys were recommended to the CIA and did a tremendous service to the country during the Vietnam War. I am sure all of my boys will agree with me that they came into the jumpers as young boys without much experience. They left with great work ethics, wonderful esprit de corps, and a new confidence. I don't know of a one of them who was not successful in their choice of vocation. I am extremely proud of the personnel and the organization during my tenure."



**Robert J. Brennan** (Missoula '41)

Pioneer smokejumper Robert Brennan passed away on June 9, 2004, at the age of 85. Prior to jumping during the 1941 season, he worked for the Forest Service for three seasons. Bob was one of the 16 rookies in the 1941 class and jumped one fire during the slow season. He and Bill Yaggy, both 22 years old, were the youngest in the 1941 rookie class. Fred Brauer and Wag Dodge were among that group.

Born in Hamilton, Montana, he moved to Priest Lake, Idaho, in 1952 and worked for many years in the logging industry as a faller. A serious leg injury in 1975 almost ended his life and career. The doctors told him he probably wouldn't walk again, but Bob proved them wrong and ended up walking ten miles a day.

**Howard B. Brist** (Missoula '41)

Howard, 64, died January 10, 1980, in Whitefish, Montana. Howard lived in the Whitefish and Kalispell area his entire life. His primary residence was in Olney, Montana, from 1950 until his death. He worked for the American Timber Company from 1950 to 1970, when he retired due to ill health.

Howard, at age 26, was one of the 16 rookies in the 1941 smokejumper crew when smokejumping was in its infancy. In a very slow year, he got three fire jumps.

**Louis C. Clark** (Missoula '41)

Louis died July 13, 2003, of sudden cardiac arrest at the Montana Veterans Home in Columbia Falls, Montana, at age 92. He was born in Chicago on January 1, 1911, and adopted by Fred and Margaret Clark. The family settled in northwest Montana, where Louis completed high school, and followed his father in working for the USFS. He married in 1941 and, at age 30, began smokejumping that summer and again in 1947 with the years between in the US Navy (43—45) during WWII. Louis did not have a fire jump during the 1941 season but had five fire jumps during the 1947 season. Following jumping he worked in construction. Louis is buried at Woodlawn Cemetery at Columbia Falls.

**R. Wagner Dodge** (Missoula '41)

Pioneer smokejumper Wag Dodge died January 12, 1955. He was in the second smokejumper crew ever to be trained and jumped in 1941 (age 25), 1943-49. Wag is often remembered as the smokejumper foreman at the Mann Gulch Fire August 5, 1949, when 12 smokejumpers lost their lives. He had been a foreman since 1945.

Spotter Earl Cooley (MSO-40) and assistant spotter Jack Nash (MSO-42) dropped 15 jumpers on the fire. Dodge, 33, and rookies Walt Rumsey (MSO-49) and Bob Sallee (MSO-49) were the only survivors from that crew.

Running up the steep hill trying to escape the fire, Dodge stopped and started what later was known as an escape fire. Dodge laid down in the burned-over area and survived. Rumsey and Sallee made it to the top of the hill and escaped through an opening in the rocks. There has always been a question as to whether or not Wag "invented" the escape fire at this moment.

In an interview with *Smokejumper* magazine in 2004, Jim "Smokey" Alexander (MSO-40) tells about a conversation he had with Wag on the Dean Creek Fire in 1942.

"After we had the fire knocked in the head, we had time to talk, as guys do. We discussed a number of times emergency exit procedures on fires.

We both decided we could escape from a fire. We talked about going into a burn and scraping a spot down to mineral soil because there's a lot of oxygen in soil, and you could breathe it, and a fire would burn over you.

"He was a nice, kind person, very unassuming, and he was a good worker, and he was savvy about fire. He knew what he was doing.

"Wag had a soft voice, and even if he was the most knowledgeable guy, he wasn't the sort who would have an authoritative voice. You'd have to listen, want to listen."

Earl Schmidt (MSO-43) in an interview with *Smokejumper* magazine in 2001 also indicates that Dodge had considered this method of survival as early as 1943.

"You asked me to write you about what Wagner Dodge had said to us about using a small fire in which to stand in the face of a threatening blaze, and the ability to jump inside it. Inside the burned area, a person would put his face to the

ground where they would have scraped away the embers or ashes and thereby increased the possibility of survival.”

#### **Everett Ambler Flint** (Missoula '41)

Everett died of cancer in Hamilton, Montana, on July 27, 1984, at the age of 79. He was born in Berwyn, Nebraska, January 28, 1905, and came to Montana as a young man, working for the Forest Service. In 1941, at age 36 and the oldest in the rookie class, he became one of the pioneer smokejumpers when he made 2 fire jumps. In 1943 he married and during WWII he worked in the Seattle shipyards as a foreman. In the mid '40s, he returned to the Bitterroot Valley where he was a rancher and farmer northeast of Corvallis, Montana. He is buried at the Corvallis Cemetery.

#### **Karl (Nussbacher) Glades** (Missoula '41)

Karl died August 3, 2006, in Louisville, Colorado. He was born January 28, 1914, on a ranch near Sheridan, Woming, and graduated from the University of Montana with a degree in forestry in 1941. He was a Missoula smokejumper in 1941 and 1942. In 1941, at age 27, Karl was one of the 12 smokejumpers who participated in jumps for the “The Forest Rangers,” Paramount Pictures technicolor movie that was released in 1942. Karl had two fire jumps in 1941 and none during the 1942 season.

In 1944, he joined the U.S. Army and was assigned to General Patton's Third U.S. Army Photo Intelligence Center. Shortly before shipping overseas, he married Vera Carol Cole and after the war, she joined him in Bavaria where he participated in the Marshall Plan as an industrial forester. In 1955, Karl began work as a forest ranger in Idaho and in 1958, he moved to Anchorage where he worked for the BLM setting aside land for state parks. He transferred to Denver in 1966 and worked at the Denver Federal Center until 1979.

#### **Francis Leonard Link** (Missoula '41)

Francis died in the Veterans Hospital in Spokane, Washington, on June 30, 1973. He was born January 10, 1912, in Washington. He received an 8<sup>th</sup> grade education and worked in logging and for the USFS. At age 29, he signed on with the smokejumpers in 1941 and 1942,

but the records are not complete and he was not named for any fire jumps in 1941. There are several fires in 1942 that lack jumper names. Both years were low fire years. Francis enlisted in the Army on September 17, 1942, and served in the 280<sup>th</sup> Ordinance until his release on January 5, 1946, at the TEC3 grade. He married following the war, living in Colville, Washington. He is buried at Calvary Cemetery in Colville.

#### **Lundrigan, Merle E.** (Missoula '41)

Merle, 84, died February 4, 1992, in Missoula, Montana. He was born in 1907 in Farlington, Kansas, and moved to Puyallup, Washington, at one year of age. After graduating from high school, he went to work with the USFS as a seasonal employee and moved to Missoula in 1927 and received a permanent appointment in 1933.

Merle rookie'd in 1941 at age 34 and also was the Smokejumper Project Leader that season and the 1942 season. He was involved in the smokejumper program in 1940, not as a jumper, but was “assigned as a squadleader for the group.” Earl Cooley, in his description of the first fire jump on July 12, 1940, said that “Merle Lundrigan asked me to go on a fire at the head of Marten Creek.” Rufus Robinson and Cooley spotted themselves and Lundrigan dropped the cargo. It was reported that Merle almost fell out of the aircraft during the cargo drop.

Merle served in the Navy 1942-45 and went to the Siskiyou N.F. in 1946 to head up the smokejumpers at the Redwood Ranger Station in Cave Junction, Oregon. Cliff Marshall and Bill Green assisted Lundrigan with the 20-man crew made up of all veterans, the majority having been paratroopers. He returned to Missoula in 1947 and retired from the position of general supply officer at the Aerial Fire Depot in May 1962 after more than 30 years of service.

#### **Roy Mart** (Missoula '41)

Roy passed away of natural causes on May 23, 2001, in Missoula at the age of 85. He was born in Miles City, Montana, at his family homestead at Big Dry Smokey Butte near Jordan, Montana. He graduated with a degree in range management from the University of Montana Forestry School in 1940 and was a smokejumper during the 1941

season before entering the Army Air Corps. He was 26 years old in his rookie season.

During World War II, he served as a recruit trainer and navigator. After the war, he was employed by the Forest Service for 10 years, then worked for a railroad as a civil engineer.

### **Robert L. Martin** (Missoula '41)

Bob, 98, died October 25, 2015, in Polson, Montana. When in high school in Oregon, he left home and walked and rode the rails to Montana, where he finished high school in Missoula. Bob worked for the Forest Service as a lookout and smoke chaser before joining the smokejumpers in Missoula in the second year of the program. He was 24 years old in his rookie season.

He enlisted in the Army Air Corps shortly after Pearl Harbor and was deployed to North Africa, where he served as a crew chief and gunner on 50 combat missions.

After the war, he worked as a heavy equipment mechanic and shop foreman. In 1949 he bought logging equipment and spent the next 30 years as a contract logger in Montana.

In retirement he worked as a gunsmith. He also worked with snowmobiles, where he invented and patented a snowmobile brake.

### **Roy Charles Mattson** (Missoula '41)

Roy died September 3, 1974, in San Diego, California. He was born June 10, 1910, in Missoula, Montana. He worked for Lighter Water Co. and Emma Mine ACM Co. in Butte prior to beginning work with the USFS about 1940. He jumped in 1941 with two fires and 1942 with no fire jumps listed, but several fires were jumped with no names recorded. Roy was 31 years old during his rookie year. He was one of the jumpers that had a role in the filming of "The Forest Rangers." He was married for two years before entering military service. His service in the US Navy took him to San Diego, California, where he served as a parachute rigger. Following his service, he remained in the San Diego area and married again.

### **William F. Musgrove** (Missoula '41)

Bill was born in Hecla, South Dakota, on May 27, 1917. In 1919 he moved with his parents

to White Sulphur Springs, Montana. Following high school graduation in White Sulfur Springs, he worked as a Forest Guard on the Lewis & Clark NF and began attending the University of Idaho. In 1941 at age 24, he was a smokejumper in Missoula, Montana, making three fire jumps. In September of that year, Bill and three other smokejumpers and a doctor, after weather prohibited them from jumping, hiked 20 miles from the Big Prairie Airstrip into a wilderness area to successfully rescue a young woman who had been shot in both knees in a hunting accident.

In January 1942, Bill entered the U.S. Marine Corps. After graduation from the Marine Corps Officers Training School in San Diego, he was commissioned as a second lieutenant in August 1942. In November 1943, Bill participated in a heroic assault on the Tarawa Atoll in the Gilbert Islands in the WWII Pacific Theater of Operations. He manned a machine gun on his landing craft knocking out enemy entrenchments. After reaching the beach, "Montana Bill" relentlessly hunted snipers for two days, and on the third day found TNT and blasted enemy pill boxes. Bill received a commendation by U.S. Pacific Fleet Admiral Chester W. Nimitz for his services on Tarawa.

On May 21, 1944, as a Marine, Bill was on board a ship in Pearl Harbor when heavy blasts of exploding ammunition and intense heat occurred. Despite the explosions and heat, Bill remained on board making tours through all quarters, aiding the injured to the main deck for evacuation. For his heroism in rescuing injured men on board, Bill was awarded the Navy and Marine Corps Medal, the highest non-combatant award for heroism in the Marine Corps and Navy. The Award cited Captain Bill Musgrove for continuing the rescue work with complete disregard for his own safety.

After smokejumping and military service, Bill returned to the University of Idaho, teaching science at Arco, Idaho, and earning a MS degree in science in 1953. In 1954 he relocated to Kingman, Arizona, and continued his career as a science teacher. While in Arizona, Bill was a Major in the Arizona National Guard.

Bill lived for a while in Farmington, New Mexico, but died in Kingman, Arizona, on December 25, 2006. He is buried at Mountain



View Cemetery in Kingman.

### **William Bramwell Yaggy** (Missoula '41)

Bill died February 21, 1946, at the age of 26 near Dixie, Idaho, when his plane crashed. He was born in Hutchinson, Kansas, on June 18, 1919, and came to Missoula in 1939 to attend Montana State University in Missoula. During his time at MSU, he earned his private pilot license through the CAA Student Flying Course in the spring of 1940. As one of the pioneer jumpers, he recorded three fire jumps in 1941. Bill, along with Bob Brennan at age 22, were the youngest in the 1941 rookie class.

Following his rookie year, he was employed by Johnson Flying Service as a pilot. He married in 1944. The fatal plane crash occurred while he was sowing grass seed over a burned area in the Nez Perce NF and he was caught in a storm. His death left his

widow and an infant son. He is buried at the Missoula Cemetery.

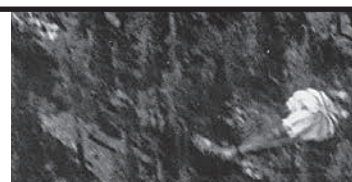
### **F. Ward Zehner** (Missoula '41)

Ward, 65, died September 1, 1982, and is buried in the Mount Idaho Cemetery near Grangeville, Idaho. He was born November 1, 1917, in Grangeville, attended two years of high school and participated in athletic sports instructing and officiating.

Ward, at age 23, was a member of the second smokejumper class in history that trained in 1941 with a fire jump on the Knoll Fire, Bitterroot NF. Ward enlisted in the Army in 1942 in Tacoma, Washington, and served with the 551st Parachute Infantry Battalion until January 1945. The 551st was disbanded, and he was transferred to the 82nd Airborne Division. He was discharged as a Sergeant. Ward was a career farmer in the Grangeville, Idaho area. 🌲



## **THE JUMP LIST** **MEN OF THE '40s**



*This column is part of the NSA History Preservation Program. All information will be kept in the Smokejumper Archives at Eastern Washington University. (Ed.)*

### **EDWARD M ARNETT** (Missoula '45)

Ned, 98, was born September 25, 1922, in Philadelphia and was a Quaker. He was drafted into Civilian Public Service in 1944 and his occupation at the time was listed as "College Instructor." Ned had six practice jumps and was one of the higher men on the crew with seven fire jumps that season. In 2012, he published a Memoir book: *A Different Kind of War Story: A Conscientious Objector in World War II*.

Ned earned his undergrad-

uate and Ph.D. degrees from the University of Pennsylvania and began teaching at the University of Pittsburgh in 1957. He joined the faculty at Duke University in 1980 and, three years later, was named a member of the National Academy of Sciences. At Duke, he was appointed the R.J. Reynolds Professor of Chemistry and retired in 1992.

### **WILLIAM H. "BILL" BRANDT** (Missoula '47)

Bill, 93, was born in Great Falls, Montana, May 25, 1927, and went through the school system there, graduating from Great Falls H.S. He worked Blister Rust Control in '44, was a lookout in '45, and went into the Navy just after

the end of WWII, June 1945-46. He was assigned to Naval Air and was rated Aviation Machinists Mate Third Class when released.

Bill used the GI Bill and enrolled in the University of Montana, starting in Forestry but finishing with a degree in Botany in 1950. While at Montana, he was a member of the Track Team. He jumped the 1947 season at Missoula. While at Montana, "I was invited to take the Rhodes Scholarship interview—not selected—celebrated at Oxford Saloon."

Bill went on to get his Masters (1951) and Ph.D. (1954) from Ohio State. Paid for graduate studies at Ohio State with funds from his GI

Bill. He went on to serve 34 years as a faculty member of the Dept. of Botany at Oregon State University (1956-1990).

Bill has always been physically active. "One summer (1948), the word was that there was to be a dance that evening at the Many Glacier Hotel. So, after work (5 p.m.), with a light pack, I set out running the 15 miles over Ptarmigan Pass and made it by 8 p.m. After a shower and cleanup, I arrived at the dance by 9 p.m. To my disgust, the dance ended at 10 p.m." In later years, he climbed Mt. Hood, rafted the Grand Canyon, and skied for 50 years. Bill is currently living in Corvallis, Oregon.

#### **GEORGE E. "IKE" EICH-HORN** (Missoula '42)

Ike, 98, was born June 25, 1922, in Ashland, Montana. Before starting school, the family moved to Scobey, Montana, where he graduated from high school in 1940. He entered Montana State University and was a Missoula smokejumper in 1942 with at least two fire jumps.

Ike enlisted in the Army Air Corps as a private in November 1942 and was commissioned a Lieutenant in June 1944. He flew fighter planes, making many missions over enemy territory in Europe. Ike wrote home in early 1945 saying he had been across eastern and western German lines and observed Russians attacking in the east.

His parents received a telegram in late March 1945

informing them that he was Missing in Action over Germany on February 21. Ike survived the War and was discharged in November 1945. He is currently living in Loomis, California.

#### **GORSUCH, ROBERT V.** (Missoula '47)

Bob graduated with a Bachelor's Degree in Forestry from the University of Idaho in 1951. He started working for the USFS as a lookout in 1943-44 before going into the Army in 1945-46. Bob jumped at Missoula 1947-50 and at West Yellowstone 1951-52, before a long career with the USFS, 1953-83.

After his retirement from the FS, Bob worked part time for FEMA working over 50 major disasters averaging three per year. He is a Life Member of the NSA and is living in Lake Oswego, Oregon.

#### **DONALD FLOYD HOSTETLER** (Missoula '45)

Donald, 95, along with his twin brother, Dwight, was born December 6, 1925, in West Liberty, Ohio. After graduating from high school in the spring of 1944, Donald and Dwight joined the Civilian Public Service program for military conscientious objectors in Camp # 4 in Virginia as members of the Mennonite service program. In May 1945, they expressed interest in becoming smokejumpers and were selected to join CPS Unit Number 103-01 and trained to become smokejumpers at Nine Mile, Montana. After

training, Donald went to Cave Junction as a smokejumper and Dwight continued as a smokejumper out of Missoula. After smokejumping, they returned to CPS Camp Number 4 and were discharged in March 1946.

Donald returned to dairy farming with his brother and father in West Liberty. While his brother gave up farming in 1953, Donald continued and in 1964 was named the Campaign County Conservation Farmer of the Year. In 1986 Donald retired from farming and moved to the town of West Liberty and started working at the local lumber company, finally retiring in 1998. However, in 2001 Donald began helping his brother, Dwight, in his toy shop making wooden toys.

#### **DALMER D.P. KAUFMAN** (McCall '45)

Dalmer, 94, was born June 16, 1926, in Moundridge, Kansas. He was listed as being a member of the Mennonite Church when he was drafted into Civilian Public Service from Peabody, Kansas, in 1944. His occupation at the time was "Farmer/Stockman." He jumped at McCall during the 1945 season and had seven fire jumps in addition to his training jumps.

He attended Bethel College in 1947 and is living in Durham, Kansas, where he has been a farmer and stockman on the family farm. Dalmer has been a Sunday School Superintendent, a School Board member and on the Board

of the Durham Cooperative Grain Elevator group.

**EARL E. KENAGY**  
(North Cascades '45)

Earl, 94, was born October 6, 1925 and is living in Woodburn, Oregon. He was a member of the Mennonite Church and was drafted into Civilian Public Service from Hubbard, Oregon, in 1944. He jumped at North Cascades in 1945 and was a member of the 12-man crew that started up jumper operations at Winthrop after the base was closed at the end of the 1940 season.

**ROBERT P. MARSHALL**  
(Missoula '45)

Robert, 96, is living in Visalia, California, according to our research. He was born September 18, 1924, and is a Quaker. He was drafted into Civilian Public Service in 1943 from West Chester, Pennsylvania, and his occupation at the time was "Student." He jumped at Missoula during the 1945 season and had seven practice, seven fire and two rescue jumps recording one of the higher number for that season.

He was discharged from CPS in 1946 and went to William Penn College in Iowa where he received his bachelor's degree. Bob married Joy Cope in 1948 and they had three children. He was the Executive Director of Self Help Enterprises.

**RAYMOND J. MAST**  
(Cave Junction '45)

Ray, 98, is living in Walnut

Creek, Ohio. He was born August 6, 1922, and is a member of the Mennonite Church. Ray was drafted into Civilian Public Service in 1944 from Sugarcreek, Ohio, and his occupation at the time was listed as "Carpenter." He jumped at Cave Junction, Oregon, during the 1945 season.

After being discharged, he returned to Ohio and married Gladys Yoder and they had three children. Ray attended Ohio State University and worked as a Nursing Home Administrator and a contractor.

**LYLE H. ROGERS**  
(McCall '47)

Lyle was born April 17, 1927, and at age 93 is currently living in Issaquah, Washington, with his wife, Dorothy. They have been married for 68 years. Lyle was in Navy boot camp when WWII ended and was assigned to a mine sweeper after he finished his training. He was discharged in 1946 and attended the University of Washington on the GI Bill.

Lyle graduated with a degree in Civil Engineering and worked for the U.S. Geological Survey before moving to Seattle, where he worked for Boeing for the next 35 years. He worked on the B-52 bomber, the B-2 flying wing bomber, first stage of the Saturn 5 rocket, and spent five months in Japan in support of the 767 airplane program.

Lyle jumped out of McCall 1947-51 and got 30 fire jumps, including ten during the 1949 season.

**CLYDE HAWLEY**  
(Idaho City '48)

Clyde grew up in Salmon, Idaho, and started working for the Forest Service at age 15. As seen with other jumpers of the 1940s, it was not uncommon to start working at this age due to the lack of available manpower caused by WWII.

Clyde graduated from the University of Idaho in 1958 with a degree in Zoology but went to work in the Nuclear Energy industry after taking a job offer from Phillips Petroleum. After spending two years with Phillips, he spent 25 years with the Atomic Energy Commission, retiring in 1980. There was a two-year break during that period in which he worked for the International Energy Agency in Vienna on the "Plowshares" program using nuclear energy for other purposes.

Clyde did consultant work for the nuclear industry until 1987. He retired in Salmon, Idaho, and moved to Nampa in 2001.

Clyde jumped for seven seasons over a ten-year period. As with many others, he was drafted in 1950 and spent two years in the military. He was one of the initial ten jumpers to go with "Smokey" Stover (MYC-46) to Idaho City and build that base. Clyde remembers Bob Caldwell (MYC-46), and pilots Claire Hartnett and Karl Bryning.

**LYLE O. KILE**  
(North Cascades '48))

Les was born in 1927 in central Wisconsin and became the first person in his family to attend high school. With three older brothers already in the war



(WWII), his mother fought hard to keep Les from being drafted. In 1947 he and one of his brothers headed west on a Harley to “see the world.” They ended up in Wenatchee and worked picking fruit for the summer.

Les returned to Wenatchee in the spring of 1948, heard the USFS was hiring firefighters to parachute into fires. After an interview, he was signed up and told to report to the smokejumper base at Winthrop.

Francis Lufkin was the head man and Jim Allen was in charge of training. Roy Goss and Elmer Nuefeld were the squad leaders, and Ken Benish was the pilot.

Les graduated from Eastern Washington University in 1954 with a teaching degree and taught for 28 years in Chelan County. Along the way, he and his wife purchased 3,000 acres and went into the cattle business.

Les jumped at NCSB 1948-51 and also worked as an aerial observer for the Wenatchee NF 1951-52.

#### **DONALD A. DAYTON** (Missoula '48)

Don met some jumpers while working on a Forest Service blister rust control crew in Idaho and became interested in smoke-jumping. He applied to Missoula and was accepted, jumping one year.

An ROTC graduate of Ohio State (Wildlife Management), Don entered active duty and was assigned to Wheelus AFB in Tripoli, Libya. After the Air Force, he began a 35-year career with the National Park Service, retiring in Santa Fe as Deputy Regional Director.

Don's most memorable tour of duty in the Park Service was as a ranger at Glacier N.P., 1956-

61. He was a sector boss on the 25,000-acre Coal Creek Fire, which blew up every afternoon for two weeks.

Late one day in the summer of 1959, a frantic young man rushed into the Many Glacier Ranger Station pleading for help. His 18 year-old hiking companion was being attacked by a grizzly. Don grabbed a 30.06 with a history of jamming on the fourth round. After climbing up the steep mountain for half an hour, Don found the 300-pound animal lying on top of its scalped victim, chewing on the calves of the young man's legs. From a distance of 35 yards, Don fired twice past the still-living boy, shattering the bear's spine with the second shot. Evacuated to a Canadian hospital, the hiker eventually recovered fully. Don received the Department of the Interior's Valor Award. 🧠

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## **Legacy Jump List—A Call to Smokejumpers**

**by Mike Bina** (Missoula '68)

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**L**ook up the meaning of “*adaptability*” and pictures of smokejumpers will enter your mind. Each fire we fought presented unexpected curveball uncertainties. This required teamwork and immediate adaptability—thinking on our feet—as the clock ticked and the fire burned.

Today COVID likewise threw unprecedented challenges forcing uncertainty into our lives. No doubt we probably relied on our Smokejumper experience and “grit.” We adapted to the challenges and got on with our lives—the best we could.

The NSA has also adapted to the curveballs.

Our board meetings continued on “Zoom” and the Trails Program operated with a modified plan. The Scholarship and Good Samaritan programs awarded critical financial support from the funds smokejumpers donated. Our History Preservation Committee documented tributes and obituaries, and our highly-valued *Smokejumper* magazine continued on schedule without a hitch.

In spite of COVID and all the uncertainties in our lives—including our own personal financial security—*what really has been impressive is that eight jumpers have placed or are in the process of placing the NSA in their wills.* Another six have




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*“This positive response shows that jumpers are incredibly grateful for what smokejumping “gave them” and, in turn, are most willing to “give back.” This also speaks to how highly they value the National Smokejumper Association and the benefits it provides.”*

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expressed interest in doing so after the COVID situation subsides. And, three members, who did not commit to the Legacy Jump List, indicated that they will instead make a larger than usual annual donation to the NSA.

Why have jumpers made this commitment?

**Jim Cherry** (MSO-57) explained, *“I chose to make one of those ‘above and beyond’ gifts to the Legacy Jump List Fund because of what the NSA stands for in and through its mission statement. The longer I live the more my smokejumper experiences, both past and present, have meant to me and have shaped my life. The NSA Values include comradeship, education, pride in work well done, loyalty and benevolence. Those are my values and I made the Legacy Fund commitment to ensure NSA’s ability to deliver on its mission and values.”*

**Don Larson** (MSO-71) explained his decision, writing, *“I served during Vietnam in the U.S. Navy Submarine Service. There was a lot of pride and trust in that business, but when I later joined the Smokejumpers, I found that jumpers have REAL pride and trust and are a highly trustworthy group. Jumpers depended on it by trusting the rigger, the spotter and our jump-mates. Jumpers were always proud of doing the job to the best of our ability, ready to out-dig the ground pounders, utilizing fitness and our firefighting, woodsmanship, first aid, and communications skills. After landing we made sure our jump-mates were okay. After tackling the fire, we hiked out, then got ready for the next one. We all built tremendous trust, pride and friendships—rare things today and something worth hanging onto,*

*remembering, and promoting. I am proud to have been a smokejumper and hope my contribution to the Legacy Jump List program will serve to inspire others to do the same.*

*“I TRUST my fellow jump-mates will share in this sentiment.”*

Thank you for considering joining others in expressing gratitude for what Smokejumping gave you and, in doing so with your legacy gift, ensuring NSA’s future. If you would like information on the **Legacy Jump List**, please contact Chuck Sheley or Mike Bina at [beanuhl@yahoo.com](mailto:beanuhl@yahoo.com) or 704.905.3399. 🙏

Turn Your Pins and Patches Into

## **Helping Other Smokejumpers**

and Their Families

**Send us your Smokejumper or other pins, Trail Crew pins, and/or patches that are hiding in your sock drawer. We’ll sell them to collectors on eBay with all money going into the NSA Good Samaritan Fund and acknowledge you in a later issue.**

*Send to: Chuck Sheley—10 July Ln—Chico  
CA 95926*



# ODDS AND ENDS



by **Chuck Sheley**

Congratulations and thanks to

**Russ Beem** (CJ-59), **Phil Difani** (MSO-67), **Mark Corbet** (LGD-74), **Peter Duddleston** (MYC-83), **Ron Siple** (MYC-53), **Joe Cayou** (MSO-59), **Tom Decker** (IDC-64), **Bobby Montoya** (IDC-62), **Vern Stevenson** (RDD-62), **Hal Nelson** (MSO-60), **Mike Ragen** (MSO-67), **Cecil Hicks** (NCSB-62), **Mike Boeck** (IDC-69), **Steen Simonsen** (MSO-91), **Richard Hildner** (MSO-67), and **Karl Hartzell** (BOI-70) who just became our latest Life Member(s).

I was reading an email from **Karl Brauneis** (MSO-77). Karl is a professional forester and retired from the USFS. He told an interesting story about hunting whitetail bucks and then related it to fire management.

"As in hunting, a lack of woodsmanship skills and comfort in the wildlands applies to today's firefighters and Forest Service employees the same as it does to the many individuals of all ages I have mentored in hunting. Why? Because the skill and comfort level is so low the fallback for the Forest Service is always 'it is too dangerous' and/or, 'for safety reasons we did not engage the fire.' I believe we are stuck with that. In the future we might see a woodsman or two but, like today, they are the exception and not the rule."

**Bill Mulholland** (Principal Chico HS Ret.): "Chuck, your story put many experiences in perspective. We do not know whom we may have helped (or hurt ) during our many student encounters as educators! Well Done."

**Nils "Swede" Troedsson** (MSO-59): "I sure enjoyed the article on Walt Smith in the Oct. 2020 issue of *Smokejumper*." Swede sent along a postcard, published by Duckboy Cards Hamilton, MT., showing Walt in a "spoof" photo, "Deprogramming a Vegetarian in Montana."

**Dennis Boyle** (Supt. Schools, Anderson CA Ret.):



"Chuck, I read your article about what is REALLY important in life in the latest *Smokejumper* Magazine. It was an impressive article about caring for others and your dedication to spread a caring touch to as many places as you discovered throughout your life. Very inspiring! It should go into the Chico School District New Teacher Handbook."

**Brian Miller** (RDD-85): "I retired from my Head and Neck Surgery practice last summer. I decided after many years that I am done learning and have absolutely no interest in acquiring additional knowledge in any field, let alone medicine. "I am going to continue raising animals on the farm here in central Maine with a goal of maintaining a vibrant and aggressive predator population, well fed by my poultry."

**Ron Thoreson** (CJ-60): "Chuck, just read your *Sounding Off* editorial in the January 2021 issue of *Smokejumper*. You're right. There are more important things than firefighting, including giving kids a fighting chance to succeed in life.

"You noted the importance of family and the problems foster kids have. I worked as a correctional officer briefly before a career in social services. In the current focus on social justice, I can tell you the most abused and disadvantaged group in our society isn't a single racial or ethnic group, it's foster kids of every race and ethnic group. I've found that foster kids have a much higher rate of a failed school experience. This is followed by economic insecurity and a much higher incidence of youth authority incarceration, followed by a much higher rate of adult felony conviction and incarceration.

"Foster kids' problems start from their original separation from their families. Many spend their developmental years as nomads roaming from one foster family to another. Some of those foster families may be abusive. Each fam-



ily move entails a change of schools. In the era of standardized testing, superintendents zealously strive for higher test scores. One preemptive move they make is to assign every incoming child of foster care to their continuing education program where they'll get exposed to the most delinquent students in the system and receive a substandard education. After that, they face a lifetime of difficulty through no fault of their own.

"Bless the smokejumper who has taken in her grandson and saved him from the fate of so many foster kids. May he gain the wisdom to one day appreciate the great gift that lady has given him."

**Ron Morlan** (RAC-69) in response to the NSA now carrying the Rookie Jump Pin: "I am happy to report that my Rookie Jump Pin is currently soldered on a gold ring and secured to my left hand's little finger. You can no longer see the tree, and the parachute is nearly polished off. Now I am 72 year young and have worn this ring for fifty one years. (Except for a short time after my soccer goal injury which tore my finger from my right hand. This is why my jump ring is now on my left hand's little finger.) **WARNING:** All you soccer referees should not wear your jump ring while fixing a loose net.

"I also have a second jump pin on the lapel of my 'going to church' jacket. I am glad you have pins available should I need another."

**Fred Donner** (MSO-59): "Our 4-Runner has a smokejumper decal on the rear window. Recently, a jogger training for a marathon asked me if I was the smokejumper. He was **Steen Simonsen** (MSO-91). We live close but previously unknown to each other. We had a three-hour lunch last week and he pledged a \$1000 life membership to revive his inactive status. Story over? Not yet. Steen knows I have spinal stenosis and a new aortic heart valve and pacemaker that limit my physical activity. He called this evening and said he is going to shovel my driveway and sidewalk this winter. What a guy, eh?"

**Jim Petersen** (Editor Evergreen Magazine): "Chuck, your new issue (Jan. 2021) arrived in today's mail. After reading your recollections about teaching and coaching, I now understand more fully why *Smokejumper* is easily the best magazine that

comes to my doorstep."

**Tom Kovalicky** (MSO-61): "John McDaniel, **thanks** for your productive tenure as the NSA Membership Chairman the past 16 years. I wish we could have the younger set of smokejumpers sign on to NSA and its Mission. Maybe that is our fate, but 1500 members is not too shabby. I will pony up to the Bar with ya at the next reunion and buy you bottles of Goodness and recall more days in the sky and on the SJ Trail Crews."

**John Donelson** (MYC-63): "Just a short note to say I always enjoy receiving the *Smokejumper* magazine, but I especially enjoyed the recent issue of Jan. 2021. Nicely put together & interesting reading throughout. Well done!"

**Chuck Sheley** (CJ-59): "I was talking to **Tommy Albert** (CJ-64). He lost his home in the Oregon fires last summer. Tommy and his wife, Kathy, have moved to Texas where they are in the process of buying a home. We got on the topic of insurance.

"It has been two years since the Camp Fire where Paradise, California, went up in smoke in a few hours. Even though 27,000 people lost everything, those who had good insurance had a road to recovery. Time and time again, I've heard nothing but good about USAA. This insurance is open to current and former military and their children. If you fit this description and live in a potential wildfire area, this might be something to consider. The 2021 wildfire season will be just as bad or worse.

"It's been over two years since the Camp Fire. **Brian Kopka** (MSO-95) and **Joel Wilkinson** (MSO-80) both lost their homes in that fire. Got a call from Joel last week. He and his wife, Cheryl, have moved to McMinnville, Oregon, and have settled in.

"Got a good note from Brian with a Christmas card. He is living in Magalia, just up the hill from Paradise. Brian is still in the tree business and has been busy with his grapple truck working PGE contracts. He cleared his lot in Paradise where his house was and has taken down over 30 hazard trees.

"Both of these gentlemen were aided by support from the NSA Good Samaritan Fund. Thanks to all of you for keeping your support of this effort."

David Hemry (MYC-64): "Hi Chuck. I have read and enjoyed so many of the articles in *Smoke-jumper* over the years, but none have struck me as more worthy and relevant than your *Sounding Off* article regarding the importance of our ability, and obligation, to contribute to youth development in positive ways. We should all take to heart that for better or worse we are role models for the younger generation and that we have so many avenues of contributing to their development,

and in some instances their salvation. Thank you for reminding us all of that."

Who can join USAA?

Our products and services are open to current and former military and their spouses. Children of USAA members can join, too.

Our products and services are open to current and former military and their spouses. Children of USAA members can join, too. 🙏

## The Greiners That I Knew

by Tom Butler (Missoula '61)

*The three Greiner brothers had an extensive smoke-jumping career at several bases. Tom gives us a good picture into the lives of these gentlemen. (Ed.)*

The Greiner family and my family both went to the same church in Claremore, Oklahoma. They lived in town and I lived in the country. Sam and Claude were twins and Tom was two years younger. They were in high school when I was in elementary school. One of the twins told me that he and his brothers dropped out of high school when he was 17 years old. They all joined the Air Force, but due to the downsizing at the time, they weren't in the Air Force very long. They went on to college and got degrees. Most of the work they did through their working years was with the Forest Service, BLM, or in Laos.

In 1961 my first fire jump was a two-manner and a 25-mile walk out to Big Prairie Ranger Station in the Bob Marshall Wilderness. Sam was working there at the ranger station that summer. I remember that he got griped at for giving us a few grapes. The ranger station was about 40 miles from the Spotted Bear R.S. at the edge of the Bob, and the only transportation was by aircraft or horse.

Claude's job that summer was in a Cessna patrolling and checking when fire crews, like us jumpers, needed something on the fire or were ready to leave the fire. Tom was jumping in Fair-

The next summer, 1962, I was on the Missoula crew to go to Fairbanks for a few weeks. Sam and Claude were jumping in Fairbanks that summer. Tom also jumped at Fairbanks but was in Laos by then.

I visited Sam and Claude several times in Claremore, since I was thinking about going to Laos. I got information about Tom, how the job was going and what living was like in Laos. I ended up holding off for a while because **Gid Newton** (CJ-55) was killed and **Gene DeBruin** (MSO-59) had been shot down and captured. I was jumping in Fairbanks when they both left Fairbanks to Laos. Both were lost within several months.

In late October 1965, I went to Washington, D. C., to interview for a kicker's job in Laos. Sam had been in Washington for a few weeks studying the Lao language. I went on to Vientiane, Laos. Sam was working for United States Aid for International Development (USAID) in Sam Thong. It was the center for humanitarian aid and management of the continuous refugee resettlements. We hauled the aid, building material, medical supplies, and lots of gasoline in 55-gallon drums up there in the Caribou or C-123 aircraft. I saw Sam a lot of times when we got to Lima Site 20 (LS-20). Sam's brother, Claude, was a kicker on Continental Air Services' C-130s out of Vientiane and Tom was a long-time Air America kicker in Vientiane.

Tom was almost killed in a C-123 aircraft

crash at LS-20A (Long Cheng). They tried to land with a full load of 55-gallon drums of gasoline. The pilot couldn't land for some reason, so he tried to make a go-around and come back around and land. However, a wing clipped one of the large karsts at the end of the runway,

and the plane crashed. One of the two pilots was killed, and Tom was flown to a hospital in Thailand. Tom told me that after the crash, he realized he was blind. When someone folded the large flap of scalp skin off his face he could see. He said that it was the greatest feeling in his life. Tom told me that he got seventy or eighty some stitches and, after several months, was back to work.

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For six weeks in 1968, I was in Mexico with Sam and Claude before returning to Laos.

Sometime after this, the brothers had a Hong Kong Junk (45-footer) built and intended to sail it to Australia. They found out that there were a lot of Indonesian pirates in between, so they sailed



*Okies headed home after 1958 season. L-R: Tom Greiner (MSO-55), Doug Bell (MSO-58). Note custom made luggage rack, high-mileage replacement tires, and crates of rat-holed C-Rations to help get through the fall semester. (Courtesy Roger Savage)*

to Mindanao in the Philippines. A typhoon was coming, so they sailed well out to sea for safety. However, it wasn't far enough out, and the wind blew them in to shore. The hatch was closed so no water could get inside, but for three days they listened to the loud booms as the ship hit the large rocks along the shore. They expected the rocks would soon smash through the sides of the ship. When the typhoon passed and the booming stopped, they opened up the hatch to look outside. They and the boat were 100 yards up on the beach. They sold it to an Australian who was going to hire a lot of the natives to dig a canal from the shore to the ocean.

Sam and Claude jumped in CJ in 1969. I was in Laos until June 1974, so I lost track of them for several years. I remember Sam's accident and death in 1971 in a helicopter accident in Alaska.

In their later years, Claude and Tom traveled quite a lot. They spent summers in one place and winters in another. In 2017 Claude and Tom died in a nursing home in Claremore, Oklahoma, after a very exciting and adventurous life. They were good Catholic Christians. They would do anything for anybody. 🙏



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# Former Jumper Builds One Of Nation's Largest Wildland Firefighting Companies

by Paul Fattig (Associate)

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**A**s a youngster living within view of the San Bernardino Mountains in Southern California, **Mike Wheelock** (CJ-76) often gazed up at Mount San Gorgonio, the Spanish heritage name for “Old Grayback” and tallest peak in the region at roughly 11,500 feet above sea level.

“I stared at Old Grayback a lot during my childhood,” he said of pondering his future.

After all, the imposing mountain represented his aspirations to achieve major goals in life. A high school football standout, he went to Mount San Jacinto College in California, studying and playing nose guard on the football team until sidelined by a second-season injury.

Undeterred, the tough young man turned to forestry work and wildland firefighting, working as a smokejumper during the summers while spending his winters building a startup he dubbed Grayback Forestry.

“When I came to Southern Oregon and the tallest mountain in the Siskiyou range was Grayback Mountain, it just made sense,” he said of the company name.

The fledgling firm he started with **Greg Schmidt**, a smokejumper pilot, in 1979 is now one of the largest privately-owned wildland firefighting firms in the nation. It has roughly 500 employees who work throughout the West, doing everything from forestry projects to fighting forest fires.

Yet, he will tell you, it sometimes felt like a roller coaster ride.

“I bought a portable sawmill in ’77 – that’s what I did during the winters,” he said of starting out. “In ’79, everyone was making money. Twenty bucks an hour was a low wage for builders back then.”

But times turned tough.

“To avoid losing everything, I did whatever

work I could find,” he said of keeping Grayback afloat. “We had a D-4 (Caterpillar tractor) and did some logging. But we lost a contract and sold everything for pennies on the dollar.”

The partnership split, yet he kept plugging along.

“I finally got a contract picking sugar pine cones for the Forest Service,” he said. “We had some old parachutes we sewed together to make the cone bags. We had learned to sew as smoke-jumpers.”

After suffering a knee injury while playing basketball, Wheelock – using only his good leg – continued climbing trees to bag cones.

“It was survival,” he said. “You did what you had to do to survive.”

He hung in there, getting more small contracts from the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management. One day a local logging company representative called, asking if Grayback could provide cleanup work after timber sales. Completion of that contract was pivotal to opening the door to other logging firms hiring the firm, he observed.

“Pretty soon we were doing cleanup work for everybody,” he said. “We did good work and honored our word. We really started growing.”

In the early 1980s, the BLM turned to the company to do full-service prescribed burning like that being done on national forests in the Northwest, including the Mount Hood and Olympic forests.

“They told us they had a backlog that needed to be done in Oregon,” he said. “We started bidding on prescribed burning contracts. It was a natural for us.

“I started hiring former smokejumpers. We started doing it all over the West. We’d start down in Northern California and Southern Oregon in the winter and spring, and move north as it warmed up.”

Although much of it was burning logging slash, there were also contracts for prescribed burning aimed at ecological improvement. The company employed innovative approaches, including using helicopters to torch debris.

"We burned thousands and thousands of acres," he said. "We opened up offices in Montana, Idaho, and in a couple of places in Oregon."

In 1986, the Forest Service – as well as the State of Oregon – began hiring more private firms to fight wildfires, dropping their earlier practice of hiring folks off the street to do the job, Wheelock observed.

"We used to do 80 percent fuels work and reforestation with 10 to 20 percent firefighting," he said. "Now it's the other way around."

The 1987 wildfire season was a particularly busy one which included the lightning-sparked 90,000-acre Silver Fire in southwest Oregon. "That's when we really started getting big," Wheelock said.

Grayback bought a helicopter in 1992, using it mainly to "helitorch" large areas of logging slash.

"Back then, I thought I was a pretty important dog," he recalled of riding out to the work sites in the helicopter.

But Wheelock is quick to observe his employees, folks like former smokejumpers **Ray Osipovich** (CJ-73), **Bob Wilken** (CJ-78), **Willie Lowden** (NCSB-72) and **Ed Floate** (NCSB-73) – all serving as head honchos – have been crucial, allowing him to concentrate on bidding for contracts.

"We pioneered a lot of the contract work with the government in terms of making them work out," Wheelock said. "Eventually, in 2001, we talked the government into five-year contracts for initial attack crews. We sat down and told them, 'Hey, you see the need for us. But for me to go to a banker, I have to have some kind of guarantee.' They understood that."

Unfortunately, the company ran into rocky times again in the mid-1990s.

"We almost lost it. We expanded too much," he said. "We thought the government was going to really embrace firefighting. I remember turning in vehicles to the bank. Before that, they would roll out the red carpet. We had one bad year and they were calling in all my notes. It was another tough lesson in life."

But the toughest test came Aug. 5, 2008, when a contract helicopter owned by another company crashed in the Iron 44 wildfire complex in the remote Trinity Alps Wilderness in northwest California, killing nine, including seven Grayback firefighters.

The crash occurred on the 59th anniversary of the 1949 Mann Gulch Fire tragedy in Montana, which killed 13 firefighters—including 12 smokejumpers.

"I was going to throw in the towel when that happened," he said of closing down the company. "I had lost firefighters in car wrecks in Colorado. But this was so terrible ..."

But a visit to two Grayback employees recovering at the Chico Burn Center in California changed his mind.

"When I get to the first firefighter, his face is burned and he is all taped up," Wheelock said. "They told him, 'Here's Mike Wheelock.' I had never met him before. He was a 19-year-old kid. His girlfriend and mom were there."

Cautioned not to tell the firefighters about the fate of their friends and workmates, Wheelock made small talk, asking how the firefighter was being treated.

"He said to me, 'Mr. Wheelock, will you let me go back to work for you?'" he said. "I started sobbing and walked out of there."

But he regrouped to pay his respects to the other firefighter at the burn center.

"His whole face was shattered – all his teeth were broken," he said. "His back was broken. I sat by his bed and was talking to him. And the same thing happened. He said, 'Mr. Wheelock, will you let me come back to work for you?' I was just dumbfounded."

Inspired by their attitude, Wheelock returned with his usual vigor to the metaphorical grindstone. Now, with a national debate burning across the nation on how to reduce the threat of wildfires, the veteran wildlands firefighter is quick to address that hot topic.

"I'm not saying every fire can be put out," Wheelock said. "But a lot of money, forests and possibly lives could be saved if more money is spent on initial attack resources."

For instance, he observed the 2002 Biscuit Fire, which was sparked by lightning within a dozen air miles southwest of the former Sis-

kiyou Smokejumper Base, likely could have been stopped by dropping jumpers on it before it blew up into a nearly 500,000-acre fire, the largest in the nation that year.

"When I first came up to Oregon, there was a lot of timber harvesting going on," he recalled. "And they got real good at tree planting. A lot of it was 90 percent survival. So, instead of having perhaps 50 to 150 trees per acre, you get 1,000 trees per acre, plus the brush."

Depending on the region, the planted trees were originally planned for precommercial thinning after a decade, commercially thinned at about 35 years and commercially logged after 50-60 years, he noted.

"When they pretty much stopped logging after the (spotted) owl wars, we had millions of acres of trees that had been planted but not being harvested," he observed, adding the result was unnaturally overstocked forests ripe for die-off during droughts and wiped out by wildfires

come fire season.

He blamed it partly on what he described as the "environmental industry."

In areas that are not commercially viable to log, thinning can both improve forest health and reduce the threat of a calamitous wildfire, said Wheelock, who describes himself as a supporter of collaborative efforts to address the burning issue.

"We need a balance to start looking at the big picture," he stressed. 🌲

*Paul Fattig's recent book is Madstone: The True Tale of WWI Conscientious Objectors and Their Oregon Wilderness Hideout.*

*From Grayback Forestry's website: What began with a smokejumper and a portable sawmill in 1979 has evolved into one of the largest and most diverse wildfire suppression and forest restoration companies in the U.S.*

*This is another story of the smokejumper "can do" attitude which has become extinct in the present-day world. (Ed.)*

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## H.R. 2478 WOULD HELP CURRENT WILDLAND FIREFIGHTERS

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by **Brian Anderson** (North Cascades '16)

The purpose of writing this article is to inform the greater smokejumper community, past and present, of current issues concerning smokejumpers and indeed firefighters at large. The issue I bring forth is the ability to buy back temporary time in the federal government to add to our service years. Increasing our years of service would allow a person to retire sooner and get proper compensation for years of firefighting for the Federal Government.

I'm sure most of you are familiar with the Temporary versus Permanent Status in the Federal Government, but I will reiterate to refresh your memory. Most of us start out as temporary seasonals in some capacity. Usually at the GS-3/4 level (currently \$13.32 and \$14.95 respectively). It is a non-benefited position, and your time in service does not count towards your 20 years of hazardous federal service. Temporary time used to be able to be bought back (Pre-1989), but that was changed as a cost saving measure by an act of congress.

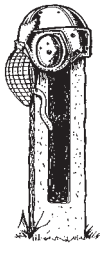
This is a problem in need of remedy. Virtually

all smokejumpers I have worked with have at least a handful of years of seasonal time. Most of us these days had to put in years on a Hotshot Crew before we were given the opportunity to rookie as smokejumpers. There are even a few current smokejumpers I know who have around a decade of seasonal time. To not allow these people to buy back this time and retire on time is abhorrent.

H.R. 2478, the Federal Retirement Fairness Act, is a bill in congress that would fix this issue. This bill, which has 62 bipartisan co-sponsors, would allow federal employees to purchase back their post-1989 seasonal time toward their retirement.

This bill, however, is currently stuck in the House Ways and Means committee and will likely die there if no action is taken. I would encourage all smokejumpers, past and present, to contact their local congresspersons and senators regarding this issue. It is only fair for those of us who serve our country in this capacity get the same rights afforded to them as many county, state, and municipal fire departments do. 🌲





# 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

*Our research team has recently added over 200 obits to the NSA website as part of our History Preservation Project. None of these have been published before. Check our website obits for this new information. (Ed.)*

## **Dennis J. Friestad (Missoula '65)**

Dennis, 76, died December 21, 2020, in Enderlin, North Dakota. He was born February 10, 1944, in Bismark, North Dakota, and raised in Kintyre, ND. Dennis graduated from Napoleon High School in 1962 and went on to Valley City State College, graduating in 1966. He earned his master's degree from the University of North Dakota.

Dennis taught at Valley City High School for 39 years and coached wrestling and football. He is in the Valley City High School, Valley City State University, and North Dakota Wrestling Halls of Fame. He jumped at Missoula 1965-66, 70-72, 77, 79-80, and at Grangeville 1967 and 1968.

## **Joe E. "Grey Eagle" Wright (Grangeville '58)**

Joe, 86, died December 4, 2020, in Bargersville, Indiana. He was born January 8, 1934, in Blue Diamond, KY. Joe was a USAF veteran of the Korean War and served in the Army Reserves until his retirement in 1994. He received his undergraduate degree in business from Berea College in Kentucky.

Joe earned his master's degree from Indiana University and was a consultant for the Indiana Dept. of Public Instruction. His heritage includes connections with the East Band Cherokee Nation. He received many awards including those from the State of Indiana, Commonwealth of Kentucky, and the Daughters of the American Revolution. Joe continued to do workshops until he was 84, when he retired the programs.

He competed in triathlons, biathlons, and marathons and would spend one week each sum-

mer bicycling over 500 miles with Army buddies.

Joe jumped at Grangeville 1958 and 1960-63.

## **Michael Alden Holmes (Missoula '66)**

Mike, 76, of Swan Valley, Montana, died December 1, 2020. He was born in Missoula on January 17, 1944. Mike grew up in Polson and was a standout athlete in basketball, football, and track in high school.

Mike received his associate degree in forestry from the University of Montana. He went on to become a Forester and worked in Lincoln and Helena, Montana, and Salmon, Idaho. His family later moved to the Swan Valley to manage the Gordon Ranch, where they ranched and logged for the next 40 years.

Mike served on the Swan Valley School Board for two sessions, served on the Swan Valley Community Council, and taught hunter's safety for 35 years. He jumped at Missoula during the 1966 season.

## **John Paul Sadillo (Redding '66)**

John, 78, died November 26, 2020, in Albuquerque, NM. He was born September 6, 1942, in Capitan, NM. Prior to retiring, he worked for the government as a firefighter, special investigator, and a smokejumper. After retirement, he moved to Roswell, NM, in about 2006. John jumped in Redding during 1966-67 seasons.

## **Donald T. Morrissey (Missoula '55)**

Don died October 25, 2020, in Tucson, Arizona. He was born January 21, 1930, in Hazleton, Pennsylvania. Don attended grade school and high school in Mahanoy City, PA. He was a Korean War veteran and served with the 187<sup>th</sup> Airborne, making two combat jumps during this time. After completing six years of service, he was discharged in 1953.

Don moved to Missoula in December of 1953 and attended the University of Montana. He earned a bachelor's degree in biological sciences and a master's in education. Don taught one year in Hamilton High School and was a teacher and administrator at Hellgate Elementary School over a span of 31 years.

Don jumped at Missoula 1955-61, 63, 64, and 66-68.

#### **Wilfred C. "Jack" Larson (North Cascades '46)**

Jack, 95, died September 11, 2020. He was born June 25, 1925, in Ferndale, Washington. At age 17, Jack enlisted in the US Army during WWII and served as a paratrooper in the 17<sup>th</sup> Airborne Division. He saw combat in the Battle of the Bulge and Operation Varsity, the jump on the Rhine that remains the largest airborne operation in military history. Jack received the Purple Heart for wounds suffered and was awarded the Bronze Star for gallantry.

Unable to find work when he returned home, Jack hitchhiked to Winthrop, Washington, where he found work as a smokejumper, working for pioneer smokejumper Francis Lufkin. Jack jumped at NCSB 1946-47.

#### **Bobby G. Karr (Redding '66)**

Bobby died August 17, 2020, in Fairbanks, Alaska. He was one of the first 20 candidates for the Redding "Smokejumper Retread Program" where USFS employees train as smokejumpers and return to their regular jobs. They were called back to duty when there was a need for more jumpers. Bobby was injured in 1963 before training and did not make it to Redding until 1966 for rookie training.

He jumped at Redding 1966, transferred to Fairbanks in 1967, returned to Redding 1968-70, and back to Fairbanks for the 1974 season. Bobby stayed in Fairbanks and worked for the BLM as Helitack foreman 1971-73 and parachute loft foreman 1974-82.

He was the BLM fixed-wing ramp foreman 1983-84. He became the fixed-wing specialist for BLM Alaska in 1985. Bobby retired in 1990. After retirement, he worked periodically at the tanker base on Ft. Wainwright/AFS.

#### **Gene E. Hinkle (Missoula '47)**

NSA Life Member Gene Hinkle, 92, died July 31, 2020, in Albuquerque, NM. He was born July 24, 1928, in Dykes, MO. Gene graduated from Missouri State University with a degree in business administration. He started his career in the financial field but changed to real estate in 1954. Gene was selected as the Outstanding Young Man of Albuquerque in 1957 and the same honor for the State of New Mexico in 1958.

In 1958 he started the real estate firm of Walker and Hinkle and was its President for 20 years. The firm was the largest all-purpose firm in the state employing over 100 salesmen.

Later Gene started the Hinkle Corporation, Hinkle Income Properties LLC, Hinkle Homes, and Hinkle Investments. He has managed income properties for over 60 years.

Gene jumped at Missoula in 1947 with seven practice and four fire jumps.

#### **Louis Goossen (Missoula '43)**

Louis, 100, of Beatrice, NE, died June 25, 2019. He was born April 19, 1919, in Beatrice and graduated from Beatrice High School in 1936. Louis was one of the few Civilian Public Service men to jump all three years (1943-45) that the CPS-103 unit was in effect.

Louis spent the majority of his career expanding the dairy industry in Nebraska and Kansas. His business developed and manufactured equipment used in the dairy industry, construction projects, and lawn care equipment. He later formed Goossen Construction building single family homes.

Louis was a lifelong member of the Mennonite Church and served on many boards in the Beatrice area. Louis was inducted into the Beatrice High School Hall of Fame in 2005.

#### **James M. Hill (Missoula '71)**

Jim died November 13, 2019. He was born April 10, 1950, in Hamilton, Montana. After graduating from high school, he worked on a Hotshot crew and rookied at Missoula in 1971 where he jumped until 1975. After smokejumping, he worked for the Forest Service in other positions until he retired in 1999. Jim got his pilot's license and bought his own airplane so he could

land at his ranch in Florence.

**Edward Norman Hotalen** (Missoula '76)

Ed, 69, died February 12, 2019. He was born July 31, 1950, in Port Jervis, New York. Ed jumped at Missoula 1976-78. He worked for the USFS for 37 years retiring in 2011 and lived in Eureka, California.

**Robert E. "Bob" MacKay** (Missoula '51)

Bob, 92, died June 9, 2018, in McLean, Virginia. He jumped at Missoula during the 1951 and 1952 seasons. Bob served two years in the Army Air Corps and was a graduate of Northwestern University.

He then joined the CIA where he had a 32-year career as a support officer in many countries around the world. Bob spent two years in Long Tien, Laos, 1970-72, where he was Chief of Support.

**Robert A. Johnson** (Missoula '51)

Bob, 88, died March 8, 2017, in Dallas, OR. He was born April 15, 1929, in Superior, WI, where he graduated from high school before attending the University of Idaho getting his degree in forestry in 1952. He jumped at Missoula 1951-52 while attending the university.

Bob started with the BLM cruising timber in Salem, OR. He was then hired by Boise Cascade in Valsetz, OR, where he worked until his retirement in 1991 as logging and timber manager.

In 1968 Bob purchased a 70-acre farm with timber and fields and planted 20 acres of Christmas trees. He managed and sold them for a number of years as well as logging the timber at intervals and replanting. In his later years, he let the Christmas trees grow into timber and harvested them as they grew into merchantable timber. In 1996 he was recognized as the Oregon Tree Farmer of the Year for Polk County.

**Robert A. "Bob" Crowe** (Missoula '46)

Bob died July 29, 2017, in Miles City, Montana. Originally from Pennsylvania, Bob enlisted in the Army and served in the Army Parachute Infantry (101<sup>st</sup> Airborne, 501<sup>st</sup> Regiment), jumped into Normandy and fought through France, Belgium, Holland, and Germany. In 1944, he participated in the Battle of the Bulge at Bastogne and

was encircled by Germans during an extremely cold period in December of 1944. Between December 16 and 27, the 101<sup>st</sup> was completely surrounded and very low on food, medical supplies, ammunition, and warm clothing.

While in Europe, Bob read an article in the Army's *Stars and Stripes* magazine about a Forest Service activity called "smokejumping" and thought he'd like to try it. Returning from the war, Bob enrolled in Pennsylvania State University and graduated with a degree in forestry. In 1946 he was hired as a smokejumper in Missoula and jumped through 1949.

Bob moved to Missoula after graduation and went to work for the White Pine Sash Company until the mid-60s. He was later employed by the Montana State Forestry Department as Director of Utilization and Marketing. There he identified wood processors and utilizations for lumber waste products—this pioneered the recycling movement for lumber waste.

Bob was an avid motorcyclist and rode his Harley back and forth across the US while he split time at school and jumping at Missoula from 1946-49. He was also active in scouting and was awarded a distinguished service award in 1971.

From an interview with *Smokejumper* magazine in 2004: In early August 1949, **Bill Hellman** (MSO-46) was the first Squadleader on the jump list. Bob was the second (Hellman had served in WWII as a Navy corpsman assigned to the Marines and took part in the island-hopping invasions in the Pacific). Hellman's wife had come to Missoula and Bill wanted to spend some time with her. Bob agreed to switch positions on the jump list with Hellman so Bill could see his wife.

On Thursday, August 4, Bob led a crew on a fire in Idaho, returning on Monday, August 8. A fire call came in on August 5 for a fire in Mann Gulch, north of Helena. The overhead on this fire were Bill Hellman (Squadleader) and the foreman, **Wagner "Wag" Dodge** (MSO-41). The rest of this tragedy is well documented.

Bob returned to Missoula on Monday, learned of the tragedy and wired his mother that he was OK. When asked how the aftermath of the Mann Gulch Fire compared with his WWII combat experiences, Bob noted, "Shocked, I was not prepared for that."



### **Ross Davies Scott** (Missoula '51)

Ross died March 27, 2016, in Lincoln, California. He was born February 25, 1927, in Victoria, British Columbia, Canada. Ross worked in a lumber camp at age 12 and later played football at Vancouver College. From there he was recruited by Washington State where he played two seasons. He rookied at Missoula during the 1951 season. Records show he only had five practice jumps. His obit states that his football career ended due to an injury as a smokejumper, indicating he was injured during smokejumper training.

Ross transferred to Western Washington University and graduated with a BA in 1952. He then completed his master's degree in physical therapy

at Stanford University and moved to Yuba City, California, in 1954 where he began a lifelong career as a physical therapist and sport medicine expert. Ross owned and operated his physical therapy clinic in Marysville, California, for over 56 years.

He co-founded Feather River Bank (known as Umpqua Bank today), was player/coach for a semi-pro ice hockey team, and was the physical therapist for the 1960 U.S. Winter Olympic Team. Ross continued to play ice hockey into his 80s at the senior level. He was an active pilot and involved as a volunteer in search and rescue operations. Ross was an NSA Life Member. 🧊

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## **BOOK REVIEW**

BY CARL GIDLUND (MSO-58)

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### ***Fire Starters: Good News Fire Stories***

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

HAVE YOU EVER prayed? If it was just once in your lifetime, I'd warrant it was the night before your first jump, or perhaps the next morning, as you stood or sat in the door.

But many of us have made daily or frequent prayer a lifetime practice. And a few of us have gone "all the way," dedicating our lives to the ministry or priesthood. **Jim Cherry** (MSO-57) and the late **Stan Tate** (MYC-53) come to mind, but I know there are legions of others.

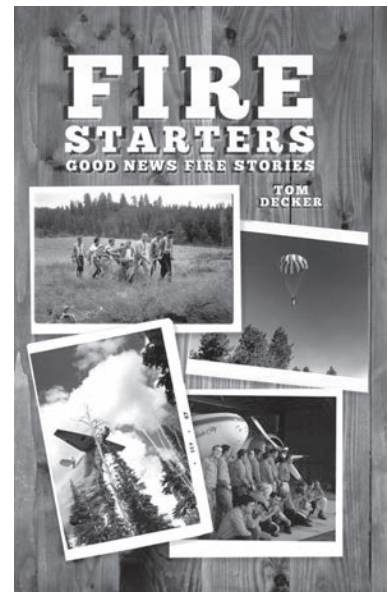
Among them is Tom Decker. Following his two years as a smokejumper, Tom served as an Army Chaplain for 28 years, then as the pastor of a Lutheran church in California. Obviously, his jumping days had a profound impact on his life and calling, for out of those experiences he conceived *Fire Starters*, a compact little book of 147 pages that draws parallels via a series of aphorisms between jumping, fires, and the Christian faith.

It's an easy read and one that you can pick up for a few pages, then put down until the next time you need inspiration or guidance. The left-hand page contains an event—probably similar to one that you experienced—and on the opposite page is the

message that Tom derives from that event. Each message concludes with a hoot, the holler that Idaho City and McCall Smokejumpers use to communicate with each other in the woods.

There are 59 two-page "chapters" which relate to Tom's messages.

Here's a sample: The left page is headed "Fire Tools" and what follows is, "We jumped the fire and landed close to the tree that had been hit by lightning. The blaze burned in the tree's top, which meant that the tree would have to come down. That was easy, but what came next was to extinguish the fire, limb the branches from the downed tree, and dig a line around the tree so that the fire—just in case there was still a hot spot—would never have a chance to go anywhere. The fireline—dug down to bare dirt and rock—was double insurance."



The facing page is labeled “Tools of the Spirit,” and here’s the message Tom derives: “Cutting trees and digging line call for the right tools, in this case a two-man crosscut saw, a fire shovel, and a Pulaski. A Pulaski is a tool, combination of an axe with sharp digging hoe.

“God gives us tools to bring us to faith. In his Word, known as the Bible, God speaks, warns, convicts, instructs, and guides, all to direct us towards the goal of retrieving a relationship with us.

“You don’t know God? It’s possible you’ve disallowed the one tool available to learn Him—his Word!

“The letter to the Hebrews says that God’s Word is ‘sharper than a two-edged sword, cutting even to the marrow of the spirit...’ And that, no doubt, is sharper than any Pulaski or crosscut saw!

“If you’ve got a Bible, you’ve got the tool! Get it out! Use it! It’ll do the job!”

“Hoot!”

Copies of the book may be obtained by going to the NSA website and order from our store. 📖

*After meals, Jim Cherry used Tom’s book to read these short stories to the NSA Trails group at the Wilderness Canoe Base in Minnesota. (Ed.)*

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# A Performance/Nutrition Perspective on the Smokejumper Food Box

by Chris Young (West Yellowstone '18)

When I think of food and fire, I think of an endless parade of torn brown bags, soggy vegetables, meat-wad sandwiches, gastrointestinal distress, headaches from sugar, and grown men “loosing-their-shit” and going off on tirades about the insufficient or unhealthy nature of their food. I think of overstuffed packs and expired food. I also think of my crewmembers stocking up their packs with food they purchased out of pocket in anticipation of not being well fed at incidents. One time a helicopter flew food buckets to our crew on top of the mountain. Inside was a boiled piece of tough pork and cold, weak instant coffee. Needless to say, we ate MRE’s that night.

I also think of those dreamy moments when the caterers did things right. They gave us the food we needed. It was tasty, functional, and exactly what we needed to get through that tough week. Years later we still talk about that one caterer who seemed to have his/her shit together. Wildland firefighters at the lowest level are the backbone of what we do. They do the physical work necessary to achieve objectives. They do the manual labor on fires, they do heavy lifting, and food is really important to their well-being, morale and productivity. They also have no control over what is fed to them.

The people who do have control over food purchasing are management, caterers, and leaders who are in charge of making these decisions. From a management perspective, it’s quite frustrating to figure out what to buy when purchasing food. There are many constraints: budget, space, weight, menu creation, norms, etc. People making these decisions don’t have deep knowledge on this subject. They are not dieticians or sports nutritionists, let alone chefs. Even if they mostly get it right, they will still get complaints. They have many more things to tend to, so they make a decision. Usually, it’s what has worked well in the

past, or they buy the cheapest food, or they think something tastes good, or it’s functional. Making decisions in this way will never get to the bottom of what is really needed. It’s a crap shoot, and if it somehow works, we don’t know why, and if it doesn’t work, it leads to frustration. I suggest we inquire into the depths of knowledge on this subject and take the advice of experts and scientists who have studied these things. Let’s analyze this problem, look at first principles, see clearly the constraints, and come up with a creative solution. This is important in advancing the norms and outcomes related to food in wildland fire.

Food boxes are para-cargoed into fires to sustain smokejumpers for three days. I was curious what experts suggested we put in the food boxes to maximize long-term health and physical performance. Then, I wanted to compare what our food boxes contained with what the experts recommended. Armed with funding from the National Smokejumper Association, I sourced Marysa Cardwell, a dietician from Salt Lake City, and Brent Ruby, a Sport Physiologist/Scientist, from Missoula, Montana, to help. Over the course of multiple Zoom meetings, we came up with guidelines for macronutrients, micronutrients, and behaviors of firefighters in relation to food boxes. I then audited our food box and compared it to the suggestions.

The largest differences I found between recommended contents and actual contents of food boxes could be corrected by increasing calories by 1000 calories/person/day, increasing water by .33 liters, decreasing sodium content, and decreasing sugar content.

On the surface this seems like a simple thing to achieve. However, I found that bringing our food box into alignment with recommendations was constrained by other factors which made the task more complicated.

Marysa Cardwell helped me find food items for



a menu that aimed to match the criteria. I spent the summer of 2020 wandering grocery stores and searching the web for additional items that would serve well in a smokejumper food box menu. Here are some insights I gained in this process.

To deduce weight, aim for compact, calorie dense foods; most should not require cooking. To lower price, seek deals for wholesale prices, utilize common household brands, and limit higher-priced specialty items. To increase variety, use different types and flavors of nuts, fruits and vegetables. Convenience in preparation is a factor.

To lower sodium, look for foods that have low or no sodium. To lower sugar, include less candy, and base the menu towards other forms of low sugar carbs.

Increasing water is important. Water weighs a lot, but it's absolutely necessary to operational effectiveness of wildland firefighters. We often run

out of water more than we run out of food. There is only so much weight the airplane can carry. Possible ways to increase water include lowering daily calories and limiting unnecessary personal items in exchange for water.

The research has been done, and though there is more to learn, menu solutions have been found. The final difficulty is salesmanship to my crew and implementation of this project in the real world. It's on me to influence, negotiate, and convince my comrades that this is worth doing. Why should they trust me and my plan? Is it really worth the trouble? I'm not convinced I've found the absolute best solution, but I've made some progress.

I would like to give a special thanks to NSA for funding this project. I also would like to thank Brent Ruby and Marysa Cardwell for their expertise and time spent on this project. 🙏

## The Big Rock Candy Mountain

by Jerry Schmidt (Missoula '54)

**A**dvanced age has its advantages. I was invited to a Forest Service dinner as the honored guest because I am one of the oldest living smokejumpers in Montana. Unfortunately, the infirmities of old age prevented my attendance. I'd like to make amends with this story.

One morning in 1954, I was asked to help extinguish a small fire on the Kootenai near the borders of British Columbia and the U.S. The pilot found the fire and, as we were getting ready to jump, I remember being told to get a good grip on the door so I would fall out early and have a long walk to the fire.

Someone was singing, "In the Big Rock Candy Mountains, the jails are made of time, and if you get locked up, just walk right out again." I also remember someone saying, "Tally Ho Old Chap," as I propelled myself out the door.

My day's fun was interrupted when I attempted to turn my chute and discovered the suspension lines were knotted. I did use some colorful language to describe my displeasure with the situa-

tion. Once it became clear that the lines were not going to untangle, I turned to "Plan B": cut the lines and use my reserve chute. Fortunately, the main opened, I swung once and landed in the top of a lodge pole pine. Not exactly what you would call landing on a feather bed.

The foreman came to help me untangle the mess that I was in. I expected him to ask if I was injured and, long after that did not happen, tell me that I earned my Smokey Bear Badge. All that he said was, "Jerry, you will have to pay the Forest Service for the tree you wrecked."

Three days later the fire was out. We were out of food and dry clothes since it was raining along the biblical lines of Noah's Ark. We were faced with a long walk in the rain and mud to Troy, Montana, where we were to meet up with our ride to Missoula. It became clear, as we walked through the willows and berry bushes, that the grizzlies had first claim in this area. To avoid startling the bears, we began singing "99 Bottles of Bear on the Wall."

It was a two-day hike to the café at Troy, Montana. We really enjoyed a meal of beef and beers, but I'll admit our table manners may not have endeared us to the other diners. After dinner, we drifted in and out of la-la land during the 200 mile drive to Missoula. I do remember someone

singing "In the Big Rock Candy Mountains." The week ended on the same note on which it had started.

At 96, my memory is not what it once was, and an aching back represents some of my life's accomplishments. This was a good week. 🍄

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# Use of Forest Management to Mitigate Wildfire

by Jim Cherry (Missoula '57)

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**T**he Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (BWCAW) located in N.E. Minnesota is over one million acres along the US/Canadian border. To the west is the Voyageurs National Park and to the north is Canada's Quetico Provincial Park. The entire area is covered with fire-prone/fire-adapted forests of pine, spruce, fir, and mixed hardwoods.

In the early 1970s, I became director of a high-adventure camping program located at the end of a corridor into the heart of the BWCAW. My camp staff assisted the USFS in fighting two major fires in 1974 and 1976 that were "right on our doorstep." The age of the forest on the camp's property (150+ years), spruce budworm infestations, several summers of droughty conditions, the threat of wind-throw, accumulation of forest litter all posed a real fire risk to the camp.

Making use of USFS aerial photos dating back several decades, it was possible to clearly see how the forest was deteriorating, the canopy cover was breaking up rapidly and setting the stage for another natural wildfire of historic proportions. In 1980 I put together a forest management plan that was approved by the board of directors. It included a full explanation of the fire threat that lay before us and a proposal for managing that threat through identification of strategically located plots of approximately ¼ to ½ acres where we would clearcut the trees, lop and scatter the tops and, after securing a fire line perimeter, we would burn the slash. The board of directors approved the plan and we carried it out successfully in late May

of 1980. In the days after the fire, we planted a mix of Norway pine and northern white cedar as appropriate to the soils. Other species would seed into the area naturally. The operation was a total success and became a good interpretive tool for teaching campers and staff about the role of fire in the forest while improving the mosaic of age groups in the vegetation.

The intent was to continue carrying out this approach into the future as it would take over 100 years to cover all the camp's area. In addition to the cut/scatter/burn approach, another option of selective cutting/thinning (timber stand improvement) would be used in areas deemed too close to buildings to use fire as a tool. This companion project was used in 1981-82 where pathways in the camp were used as virtual firelines, and the areas enclosed by those pathways were cleared of undesirable and highly flammable species such as balsam fir and thick clusters of black spruce. I left the camp for other work at the end of 1982 and the program was not continued.

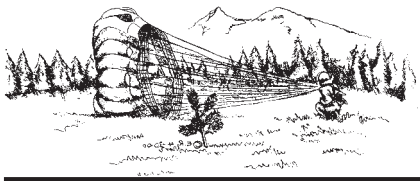
On July 4, 1999, a derecho (high, straight-line wind) tore through the BWCAW and flattened millions of trees over thousands of acres. A large portion of the camp's forest was devastated, but the 1980 plot was untouched and continued to grow with vigor. Areas of the blowdown were cleaned up and additional planting of pine was undertaken.

In May 2007 an unattended campfire escaped and quickly spread and raced through miles of forest damaged by the derecho, insect infestations,

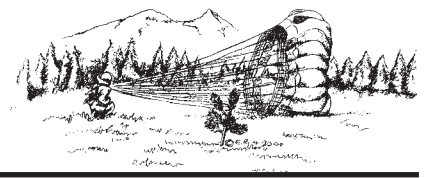
and a century of fuel buildup. The 75,000-acre crowning fire jumped more than ½ mile of open water and burned off a huge part of the camp's island property, resulting in the loss of 40 of the 60 structures. In walking through the aftermath of the fire a month later, I saw that the 1980 project plot revealed insights. Though located on a high-point of the island and although crown fire had scorched the forest on all sides, when the fire hit the area of the 1980 plot it dropped to the

ground, burned through with a cooler flame, and the trees in the plot had a 90 percent survival.

The forest management done in 1980-82 had mitigated the impact of the fire. One can only wonder what the impact might have been if the project had been continued. Forest and vegetation management together with implementing **Fire-wise USA®** will make a difference in property loss and the health of the forests we love and depend on for quality of life. 🌲



## Notes from the Ranks



Pat McGunagle  
(West Yellowstone '19)

THE 2020 FIRE Season is in the books, at least for smokejumpers. Final reports for each smokejumper base are shared at the Base Manager's meeting in December. Details such as lost time injuries, pounds of paracargo, days on contract for each aircraft, parachute performance statistics, personnel availability, and single-resource days served, among many other numerical descriptions of the season.

Eventually these numbers trickle down to yours truly, and I may create a hazy portrait of what was actually a

hazy summer for many of us living in the western U.S. during an historic year in both fire and pandemic terms.

Smokejumpers are an essential resource of land management agencies in the west. Staying "lean" in the age of COVID-19 to fulfill the jumpers' inherent desire to be "low maintenance" included diversifying the options of each base to mitigate COVID concerns, while also decreasing response times to new starts. As part of the operational protocol for the season, as defined by agency leads, decreasing particulate matter from large fires would be an objective considering that COVID is a respiratory disease.

The season started off slow for many smokejumpers because prescribed fire around the country was put on hold due to COVID concerns. Ram-Air Transition Training (RATT) classes were predominantly canceled (RDD graduated five RATTs) and

rookie trainings were pushed back several weeks. Bases like WYS and GAC conducted their first-ever, in-house rookie trainings, whereas NCSB trained what might just be the final round parachute rookie class ever, graduating three rookies from what your friendly local NCSB jumper will always remind you, especially in Missoula, is the "birthplace of smokejumping."

The few million burned acres in California and Oregon aside, smokejumpers also completed an historic year. The USFS bases jumped 168 fires with 959 jumpers; the BLM bases jumped 133 fires with 987 jumpers. FS jumpers completed 2702 proficiency jumps (no reported numbers from NCSB, MSO and MCC); BLM counterparts completed 2022 proficiency jumps. West Yellowstone completed the year's sole rescue jump for an injured FS seasonal worker. Forest Service bases pounded 21 fires, and the BLM was



right there with them with another 21 fires pounded. BLM smokejumpers filled 136 single resource assignments; FS smokejumpers filled 270 single resource assignments for 3778 shifts on large fires (no data for BOI, FBX, RDD or NCSB single resource shifts).

The 2020 season was serviced by 476 active smokejumpers, 335 in the FS and 141 in the BLM. I do not have data on how many round parachute jumpers remain on the List. The CR-360 ram-air parachute (primarily FS) logged over 4500 jumps, and the DC-7 ram-air canopy (primarily BLM) can be interpolated at around 3000 jumps on the year.

Many thousands of pounds of cargo were dropped all over the west. RDD stands out with an exceptional para-cargo year supplemented with reinforcement PC boosters from AK. The JPAD (Joint Precision Airdrop System) program continues to evolve and operational drops to hotshot crews in need on large fire complexes, or remote fires, were conducted.

Boosting was dramatically curtailed due to COVID concerns. NCSB received zero boosts and FS boosts to AK were lower than average. WYS received zero boosts; MSO operated Miles City strictly as the “Module of One” protocol directed for all fire resources in the west. No crew mixing was allowed. The greatest fear, examples of which occurred on several hotshot crews, was that one person would, through

random chance or poor decision, cause the entire crew to go down for fourteen days. Fourteen days of lost pay on a fire assignment could make or break a summer, especially in the case of having a family or car payment or any of the other myriad life factors we all must recognize as part of this job.

McCall operated using the outstation model that Boise has been successfully incorporating for years, and this seemed notably profitable as MYC jumped right up near their ten-year average numbers. In a strange season where many bases were not sharing boosters, this model stands out among the pie charts and other graphs as a means to “find business.”

West Yellowstone spent half the year as a construction zone as the new ramp was constructed; the four-square competitions have never been smoother. NCSB may be the next construction zone as the base there is “shovel ready” for some new improvements.

The De Havilland Canada (DHC-8) Model 106 airframe underwent testing in Fairbanks, Missoula, NCSB, and Boise and has ultimately been recommended for approval as a smokejumper aircraft. The capabilities of this “Dash 8” airframe should harken back to the “Doug Days” of smokejumper heritage: the ability to seat twelve to sixteen jumpers, 8,000 pounds of cargo, and a large door exit. The pressurized cabin and, thus, increased response radius of the aircraft

are phenomenal characteristics. The Dash 8 dominated the “around the campfire” talk this summer and many back-of-the-SPAM-label calculations were completed as to just where this aircraft could IA from given its flight characteristics. “You could IA Edmonton from Fairbanks, or southern Arkansas from Boise!” “You could jump eastern Montana from Juneau!” Many “ultimate future SMKJ superbases” were devised using some sort of decision matrix including favorite local brew-pubs, proximity to skiing or universities, and the response capabilities of the Dash 8.

I think that in all aspects, the data from 2020 will be sifted through for decades. Among the lockdowns, acres burned, dollars spent, and the pandemic in general, many aspects of this year just don’t seem real. I love smokejumping because there’s a distinct moment of clarity one finds when you push yourself out of an aircraft. I think this clarity is something we all wish to find after a year like this. As budgets for wildfire response react posthumously to entire forests burning in a year like 2020, the economics of smokejumping and aerial capabilities in general cannot go unnoticed. How we sell this program now and with what may be large budgets over the next few years will determine just how hazy many of our future summers will be.

Now, about that Dash 8, I heard it could IA Hawaii from NCSB... 🍄