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## Smokejumper Obituary: Lewis, John Sylvester (McCall 1953)

National Smokejumper Association

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# Smokejumper Obituary

## Lewis, John Sylvester (McCall 1953)

John, 26, died August 13, 1961, in Laos when the Air America plane, he was in crashed. Also killed in the crash were his close friend Darrell Eubanks (MYC-54) and Dave Bevan (MSO-55). They were dropping cargo to Hmong General Vang Pao at the time of the crash.

John was born June 10, 1936, in Lampasas, Texas. He graduated from Lampasas High School where he excelled as a student and an athlete. John rookied at McCall in 1953 at the age of 17 years, two months and six days-one of the youngest smokejumpers on record.

In 1959 he joined other smokejumpers working for the CIA and was first involved in night flights over Tibet dropping men and cargo. In October 1960, he was working supply mission from Okinawa to Laos and in 1961 he was involved in Guatemala working in preparation for the Bay of Pigs invasion in Cuba.

The three smokejumpers killed in the 1961 crash in Laos were the first Americans killed the Laotian theater of the Vietnam War. In 1994 the Cuban Veterans of the 2506 Assault Brigade awarded John a posthumous medal for valor for his participation in the Bay of Pigs invasion. In 2002 the CIA posthumously awarded John the agency's medal of valor.

On May 22, 2017 three stars were added to the CIA's "Wall of Honor" representing John and the two other smokejumpers killed in the 1961 crash in Laos.

John jumped at McCall 1953-54, 56-58, Idaho City in 1955 and Fairbanks in 1959.

*(end of excerpt)*