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Smokejumper Obituary: Robinson, Rufus P. (Missoula 1940)

National Smokejumper Association

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Smokejumper Obituary

Robinson, Rufus P. (Missoula 1940)

Pioneer smokejumper Rufus Robinson died May 3, 1987. He was born in 1905 at Wallowa, Oregon, and his family moved to Turlock, California in 1919. Rufus was the first of the 1940 Missoula crew to receive smokejumper training, going to Winthrop, Washington, to do so. He then return to Montana to start construction of the parachute loft at Moose Creek.

On July 10, 1940, Earl Cooley, Jim Waite, Jim Alexander, Dick Lynch and Chet Derry joined Robinson at Moose Creek. Merle Lundrigan, not a jumper at that time, was assigned as the squadleader for the group.

On July 12, 1940, Rufus and Earl made the first fire jumps in the United States on the Marten Creek Fire, Nez Perce NF. Jim "Smokey" Alexander (MSO-40) recounts the first fire jump and Rufus in a 2004 interview with Smokejumper magazine: "They went 'eeny-meeny-mieny-mo' and then decided on Rufe and Earl. Rufe, because he was an older man, about 35, and Earl had to be about 22.

"We were all looking up to Rufe as the more experienced. He was the guy that had a lot of experience fighting fires and kind of calmed us down. [He was] easy-going and completely unflappable."

Robinson only jumped the 1940 and '41 seasons before moving on to pursue work in the roofing business. Rufus had the high number of fire jumps for the 1940 season with five.

He married in 1942 and lived in Santa Cruz, California, and Pasco, Washington. In 1958 he moved to Klamath Falls, Oregon, and in 1966 to Lenore, Idaho where he worked as a roofer until he retired. He is buried in the Wallowa Cemetery.

(end of excerpt)