

May 2020

Smokeyjumper Obituary: Bradford, Lester E. (Missoula 1959)

National Smokeyjumper Association

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Recommended Citation

National Smokeyjumper Association, "Smokeyjumper Obituary: Bradford, Lester E. (Missoula 1959)" (2020).
Smokeyjumper Obituaries. 506.
https://dc.ewu.edu/smokeyjumper_bios/506

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Smokejumper Obituary

Bradford, Lester E. (Missoula 1959)

Lester died March 3, 2019, at his home in Mount Vernon, Washington. Upon his graduation from high school, Lester joined the Army in June 1944 and was trained as a tail gunner.

Lester took advantage of the GI Bill, attending Yale University, graduating with a MS in forestry. Lester had several jobs with the USFS, including smokejumping. In 1950 Lester had seven training jumps and two fire jumps. In 1951 he had two refresher jumps and five fire jumps.

At Yale, Lester met Winifred Smith, a young doctor who as a missionary went to Sierra Leone, West Africa. Lester took a special course for missionaries in agriculture at Cornell University with a plan to join Winifred in Africa. He took a freighter to Sierra Leone, docking in Freetown on December 20, 1952 and they were married on December 23. They continued to live in Sierra Leone for the next 17 years. Winnifred ran a birth and pediatric center and Lester an agricultural test farm. While there, they were joined by five of their children.

In 1968, the family moved to Bogalusa, Louisiana, with Lester working for the Louisiana State University extension service and earned a PhD in education. After several years in Louisiana, the family moved to Mount Vernon, Washington where Lester worked as a County Agent in charge of 4-H programs, education, and forestry for Skagit and Island Counties.

In 1979, Lester accepted a job with a contractor for the U.S State Department's Agency for International Development. He and Winnie travelled to Sudan and Pakistan.

After Lester officially "retired" he travelled overseas for many short-term volunteer jobs in Zimbabwe, Bolivia, Brazil, Ukraine, Indonesia, and Haiti. Lester studied and spoke many languages including, French, Spanish, Latin, German, Russian, and African languages including Kono, Mende, and Krio.

(end of excerpt)