

April 2015

Smokejumper Obituary: Samsel, Hal A. (Missoula 1949)

National Smokejumper Association

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Smokejumper Obituary

Samsel, Hal A. (Missoula 1949)

Hal died April 2, 2015, just two weeks after the passing of his wife of 64 years, Betty. His Dad was District Ranger on the Seely Lake District and he started fighting fires at age 14. Hal is well known in jumper circles having stayed with the job from 1949 until his retirement in 1980. Brothers Bill (MSO-61) and Kirk (MSO-60) were also jumpers.

After graduating from high school, he rookied in 1949 before joining the Marine Corps. Hal returned to jumping in 1952 and was hired full-time at Missoula in 1957. During the last 10 years of his career, he was the parachute loft foreman retiring in 1980.

In a 2004 interview with Smokejumper Hal said he was detailed to just about all of the bases at one time or another during his career. He told about one time 16 Missoula jumpers were sent down to Medford. It was the summer the airstrip at Cave Junction was closed for repairs. Being in Medford, there was no mess hall. They were on their own for food, and their money ran out quickly. They prayed for fires so they could get something to eat. The welfare fund sent down \$200 that didn't go too far with 16 jumpers. Hal said it was a good thing there was a peach orchard nearby.

Hal had seen many changes in smokejumping during his tenure on the job. There were many veterans returning from WWII in his rookie class as well as men like Fred Brauer (MSO-41) and Fred Barnowsky (MSO-42) who jumped before going off to war and were returning to that job. He had seen the jumpers go from the college types, who jumped and went on to another life, to the career jumpers.

After retiring, Hal and his wife lived in Missoula for several years while they were completing their cabin at Flathead Lake where they lived until their passing.

(end of excerpt)