

June 2014

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National Smokejumper Association

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Smokejumper Obituary

Alexander, James A. "Smokey" (Missoula 1940)

The last member of the original 1940 smokejumper crew, Jim Alexander, died June 23, 2014. Smokey was one of the thirteen original smokejumpers trained in 1940. He was a graduate of the University of Montana and the forest service employee who represented the Cabinet NF in the first smokejumper training group.

From a 204 interview with Smokejumper magazine: "To choose who would be the first smokejumpers (David) Godwin decided to choose ten men, one to represent each of the ten major forests. He wanted each man to have a minimum of five years' experience fighting fires. The supervisor chose me in the spring of '40 to represent the Cabinet National Forest.

"We were at a place called Blanchard Flats, just north of Seeley Lake. Each new jumper made six practice jumps: Three jumps at Blanchard Flats and three jumps at the landing strip before any were made in timber. We had two minor injuries during the training. One was a sprained ankle. The other was one guy's ripcord got caught in the shroud lines, and he pulled his shoulder pulling the ripcord. Another guy didn't pull his ripcord until 2,000 feet, and Frank Derry sent the guy on his way. The guy didn't want to continue jumping anyway."

On July 20, 1940, he and Dick Lynch (MS0-40) jumped the third fire in smokejumper history on the Cox Creek Fire, Bitterroot NF. They found the fire by coordinating azimuth readings from two lookouts and put it out shortly after smoke started appearing above the trees. The fire was so isolated that it took them 19 hours to walk about 40 miles to the nearest ranger station.

Smokey began Intermountain Business Forms in 1960 while living in Boise. After moving to North Carolina in 1989, he and his wife, Dorothy, returned to Boise in 2005.

(end of excerpt)