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National Smokejumper Association

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Smokejumper Obituary

Roth, Kenneth W. (McCall 1946)

Ken died February 24, 2007, in Missoula. He joined the Navy during WWII, serving as a gunner's mate on the USS Sunner. Ken jumped five seasons at McCall and took flying lessons on the G.I. Bill. He went on to log more than 13, 000 hours and flew everything from Stinsons to Travelairs, Ford Trimotors, Lockheed Electras, helicopters to DC-4s. In 1952 he signed on with the Johnson Flying Service as a full-time pilot.

On Aug. 17, 1953, Ken took off from an airstrip in the vicinity of Spotted Bear Ranger Station. He and seven smokejumpers headed toward a fire in the Hungry Horse area. The engines of the Trimotor cut out. He decided to land the best he could, short of the looming hillside, into a stand of timber. The impact literally broke open the Ford's cockpit and all but demolished the plane, with no loss of life. The only injury was a fracture to Ken's right foot.

In early July 1960, Ken flew himself and his DC-3 airplane out of trouble while on a Forest Service flight near Belgrade. Bad air and an altered center of gravity caused the twin engine cargo plane to roll upside down. Banking steeply, he missed the cliff, brushed the plane's tail section and knocked off the tail wheel. Ken kept the plane in the air and returned to Belgrade.

(end of excerpt)