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## Smokejumper Obituary: Christler, Mel (Pilot 0000)

National Smokejumper Association

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# Smokejumper Obituary

## Christler, Mel (Pilot 0000)

Christler, Melvin "Mel"

THERMOPOLIS, Wyo. - Melvin Henry Christler, age 87, longtime resident of Wyoming and aviation pioneer, broke from the bounds of this earth to soar with his maker Dec. 26, 2005. He was given his heavenly wings after having been grounded by a long term illness.

Melvin was born on Jan. 21, 1918, to Lockwood G. and Hattie Connolly Christler, in North Battleford Saskatchewan, Canada. His parents moved the family to Monroe, Mich., when Mel was an infant.

In his words, "Mom told me that my interest in flying began while I was still in the womb. One day Mom and Dad were traveling in a horse-drawn buggy when an airplane flew over and spooked the horses. She felt me jump with excitement!" After building many little toy planes, he built a plane that he could sit in and "fly" in at age 11. When Mel was 13 years old, his family moved to Wyoming and bought the Castle Rock Ranch up South Fork above Cody.

He achieved his dream when he soloed in a Taylor J-2 Cub. A year later, he purchased a Piper Cub. Little did he know the effect this plane would have on his life! Mel and his brother Walt met the loves of their lives one afternoon, when they persuaded Frances Brummond and Lorraine Fenex to wash the plane for an airplane ride. Mel and Frances were married Jan. 18, 1940. This union lasted 53 years and resulted in six children, 21 grandchildren, 28 great-grandchildren, and one great-great-grandchild.

He built his time in an OX5 Eagle Rock, receiving his Commercial License and Instructors Rating from the CAA in the mid '30s. During 1941, he instructed in the Civilian Pilot Training program, then for two and a half years, trained Army cadets in Stearmans.

Next came a stint in the Air Transport Command, including a year of flying modified B24 gasoline tankers over the Hump between China, Burma and India.

Shortly after the war, Mel returned to northern Wyoming, opening a fixed base operation in Greybull, using J3 and Stearman sprayers. He was one of the first to introduce large aircraft in aerial application and firefighting efforts, starting with a Douglas B-18 in 1950 and later adding four engine Consolidated PB4Y2s. Selling his business in 1961, Mel moved to Thermopolis. There, he operated the first corporate jet aircraft in Wyoming, a Jet Commander for Empire State Oil.

Melvin and Frances owned and operated three businesses: Big Horn Flying Service, Christler and Avery Aviation, Christler Flying Service. They performed aerial application, fish planting, slurry bombing, U.S. Forest Service smoke jumping and flight instruction. He pioneered aerial pipeline patrol, which was previously done on foot.

For several years, Mel was an FAA designee examiner and was also appointed to the State Aeronautics Commission. Melvin was inducted into the Wyoming Aviation Hall of Fame in 1999.

He married Carol Watson of Hallsville, Texas, in 1994.

Melvin is preceded in death by his wife Frances in 1993; five brothers, Elmer, Harold, Harry, Elbert and Walter Christler; and one sister, Olive. He is survived by his sister, Betty Schultz, Cody, Wyo.; wife Carol Watson, Hallsville; sons, Lockie Christler, Enumclaw, Wash., Stephen Christler, Loveland, Colo., Tony Christler, Sherwood, Ore., Robert Christler, Sherwood; daughters Carolyn L. Christler, Soldotna, Alaska, Sylvia Lippincott, Thermopolis; 21 grandchildren, 28 great-grandchildren, one great-great-grandchild.

Memorial service will be held at 3 p.m. on Dec. 30, at Holy Trinity Episcopal Church, Thermopolis.

Donations may be sent to Kalif Shrine Center, PO Box K, Sheridan, WY 82801.

*(end of excerpt)*