

January 2002

Smokejumper Obituary: Roemer, Joseph J. "Joe" (Missoula 1952)

National Smokejumper Association

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Recommended Citation

National Smokejumper Association, "Smokejumper Obituary: Roemer, Joseph J. "Joe" (Missoula 1952)" (2002). *Smokejumper Obituaries*. 1200.
https://dc.ewu.edu/smokejumper_bios/1200

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Smokejumper Obituary

Roemer, Joseph J. "Joe" (Missoula 1952)

On August 7, 1997, Joe Roemer died suddenly and unexpectedly from a viral heart infection. He was 64 years old. He had no symptoms of his condition, jogged with his dog, had dinner with his family at home in Yakima, Washington, and died later that evening in his sleep. He is survived by his widow Phyllis. He had retired not long before his death, after a long career as a chemist at the Atomic Energy Commission National Laboratory, Hanford, Washington. He was active in mountain rescue work throughout his career and in retirement. A hobby shared with his family was the breeding of award winning Siamese cats.

Joe was a competent woodsman, having grown up in Montana and Idaho as the son of a Forest Service ranger. This valuable background served him well on fire crews and hastened his promotion to squad leader by his fourth season in the jumpers. Mention the record breaking 1953 fire season, when we averaged over 10 fire jumps per man, and most jumpers will smile with glee and pat their wallets. However, Joe would grimace since he made only one fire jump. When questioned about the single jump, Joe would explain that when walking out of a fire the crew had to cross a creek on a hand-operated cable car. "Damn, if I didn't get my left index fingertip severed between the cable and the wheel!" The worst part was that Stan Barclay (Missoula'51-deceased) used the severed flesh as bait to go fishing and Al Casieri, "Wild Al," (Missoula'52), kept badgering me with skin and bone questions and wanted to examine the wound prior to getting it bandaged. "The wound was serious enough to keep Joe off the fireline for the rest of the season.

As a first year squad leader in 1955, Joe headed a five-man crew that was to dismantle and move two log cabins three miles and reassemble them at the Shearer landing strip in the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness Area of Idaho. The logistics and personnel challenges were daunting. (Those two cabins are still in use at Shearer today.) Most Missoula jumpers had an opportunity to visit with Joe at the 1995 N.S.A. Reunion. It is sad to realize his untimely death will deprive us of his friendship.

(end of excerpt)