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## Smokejumper Obituary: Rumsey, Walter B. (Missoula 1949)

National Smokejumper Association

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# Smokejumper Obituary

## Rumsey, Walter B. (Missoula 1949)

Walt, 52, died June 12, 1980, in a commercial plane crash in Nebraska. He was born about 1925 in Nebraska. He was one of the three survivors of the Mann Gulch Fire in 1949 that killed 12 jumpers and fire guard Jim Harrison who had jumped at Missoula in 1947.

From Smokejumper magazine (condensed): "We arrived over the fire about 3:15 p.m. The air was bumpy and rough. Most of us were airsick and we could hardly wait get out of the plane. We all landed hard on the rocky ground. We left the jump area in single file and headed for the fire. The fire had spread in the hour it had taken us to get organized. and the wind was blowing briskly. Dodge led us on a gradual climb back up the north slope of the canyon going west. The fire was burning fiercely, and we could hear the roar of the flames.

"The plan was to get behind the fire. It soon became apparent that the fire had jumped across the gulch ahead of us and was now burning on our side of the draw between us and the Missouri River. Dodge immediately told us to drop our tools and gear and to follow him. The roar of the fire made it increasingly difficult to hear. Dodge turned towards the ridge, and we followed single file. Many of the jumpers were yet unconcerned and had not dropped their tools as instructed. There was no panic.

"The fire was catching up with us. We were exhausted from the climb but increased our pace through fear. The fire was on us now. Dodge realized we couldn't make it and yelled for us to gather around him. I was close enough to see his lips moving but couldn't hear his voice above the terrific roar. His orders were lost in the roar of the fire. Four of us raced for the rocky ridge, it seemed like we were covering 15 feet every step. We ran through the top of the ridge and found a rockslide. I thought that if this isn't big enough to protect us, it's too bad because we couldn't go another step."

*(end of excerpt)*