

THE NATIONAL SMOKEJUMPER
ASSOCIATION

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JANUARY 2016

SMOKEJUMPER



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Front cover: Combination of photos from Reunion practice jump. (Courtesy *Johnny Kirkley*)

Back cover photo: Poster display Springfield Museum smokejumper exhibit



Message from the President



by **Jim Cherry**
(Missoula '57)
PRESIDENT

As I WRITE this article, in September 2015 my wife and I have recently returned from an NSA Trail Project in northeast Minnesota's Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness.

It was only one of more than 20 trail projects held across the country that brought together friends, new and old, to share in a time of special fellowship and memories while doing some valuable work to benefit our nation's outdoor treasures. Our project is unique in that it is much larger than others – 23 participants – and we actively recruit and include spouses and non-jumper friends.

The U.S. Forest Service couldn't come up with a project for us this year, so we threw all of our efforts into doing forestry, fire-wise and maintenance work for Wilderness Canoe Base, a high-adventure church camp that has a major emphasis on serving at-risk

youth from the inner city. The camp provides our lodging and meals in exchange for our work.

For the second year running, I shared with our crew some readings from **Tom Decker's** (IDC-65) "Fire Starters," a collection of short remembrances from his smokejumper years that he has paired with some theological observations.

Tom served as an army chaplain for much of his career. I met with Tom this past fall when he and his wife were traveling through Iowa in their RV.

Tom would like to eventually publish these writings. He has given the NSA permission to print a few of them in the magazine; you will find one printed in this issue. They have a Christian message. I'm certain that our readers represent every spectrum of belief and unbelief. If you don't agree with Tom, then just skip his article.

I know that during more youthful days, many jumpers would be classified as "hell raisers." At the same time, as the years go by and life experiences accumulate, we sometimes have the "hell scared out of us" and there is a greater appreciation for what Tom is sharing.

The NSA's Good Samaritan Fund has been active this past

year, as requests have come for financial assistance for smokejumper families that have faced serious medical situations with their children. It was our honor to have been asked to help and to be able to respond to their financial need.

A special word of thanks needs to be shouted out to all of you who have helped support the GSF through the past years with your special gifts. There is no stronger evidence of the bond between us than when we stand ready to help one another in a time of need. Check out the most recent contributions to the GSF in this magazine and the information on how to make your next donation.

I want to cast a challenge out to those of you who rookied in the 1980s and 1990s. Much of the present leadership of the NSA is coming from those who rookied in the '50s, '60s and '70s. We are an aging group. While we love the work we

do for the NSA, "we ain't gonna last forever." We need to have a younger crop of leadership start to step forward.

I know you have it in you. If you didn't, you would never have made the cut to become a jumper in the first place. If this "brotherhood," this history of ours, this work that we do – if any of this means anything to you, then it's time to step forward so we can start a transition to a new generation of NSA leadership.

You don't know how to do it or what it would require? Contact me. I can help show you the pathway.

Fire Starters

by Tom Decker (Idaho City '65)

Hoot!

We finished the work on the fire and lay on the hillside, knowing that the next day the helicopter would

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Smokejumper base abbreviations:

Anchorage.....ANC	Grangeville.....GAC	Redding.....RDD
Boise.....NIFC	Idaho City.....IDC	Redmond.....RAC
Cave Junction.....CJ	La Grande.....LGD	West Yellowstone WYS
Fairbanks.....FBX	McCall.....MYC	Whitehorse Yukon YXY
Fort St. John.....YXJ	Missoula.....MSO	Winthrop.....NCSB

Get Smokejumper One Month Before Anyone Else

NSA members are signing up for the electronic version of *Smokejumper* that is delivered via email. It is sent in a PDF file that contains everything that is in the hard copy issue.

The advantages are: early delivery (a month ahead of USPS), ease of storage, and NSA postal expense savings. If you like the hard copy, you can download and print it at home.

NSA Director **Fred Cooper** (NCSB-62) says: "I will opt to have my magazines delivered electronically rather than via USPS to save us direct \$ in printing and mailing, not to mention your hand labor in processing. I think I mentioned in an earlier message that I'm having other magazines/newsletters delivered electronically. It takes less space to store them electronically and if I do want a hard copy, it is easy to print using the *Fast Draft printer option* which allows printing 48 pages in less than two minutes on my printer and uses a lot less ink."

If you want to be added to the electronic mailing, contact Editor **Chuck Sheley** (CJ-59):
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pick us up. It was hot, boring, and we were miles from anywhere. To break the monotony, we decided to “hoot” a bit.

The “hoot” – yes, the same “hoot” as wise old owls make – carries in the woods, definitely farther than a voice. The smokejumpers picked the hoot as a tested and true method of signaling other jumpers in dark, smoky fires.

As my jump partner and I pitched rocks down the hill to pass the time, we hooted, “Hoot! Hoot!” We laughed and joked about it, not expecting anyone to ever hear us. Before long, we got a response! Somebody on a trail below hollered, “Hey! What’s up?”

We hadn’t known that anybody was there and were startled to hear someone!

Sometimes we think we’re all alone, only to find out that there’s a crowd! And, unbeknownst to us, they’ve been there all along!

The body of believers is a case in point. We “... are surrounded,” the writer to the Hebrews said, “by a great cloud of witnesses” That gives us cause to think, wonder, and take courage when it’s time for us to share the work of the Christian faith.

Tired, bored, burned out? Try a hoot! “Hoot!” Who’s out there? We may be surprised at the answers we get! Hoot! 🦉

“Beas”

by John B. Driscoll (Missoula '68)

Part 1

Smokejumpers

Ray “Beas” Beasley (MYC-52) said, “Be good,” and smiled back at my last look toward his pale face and gray hair, half-lighted by afternoon sun flowing in the window over his brown lounge chair.

Now that he and Jane had moved to town, there was no wall behind him to hang the black-and-white photo of a Ford Trimotor aircraft and four men suited in smokejumper gear, with him, trim and cocky, his hair combed so that he looked square-jawed James Dean-ish.

He stands with his hands on his hips, wearing a short-sleeved white t-shirt under his spotter's parachute and harness. By then he'd served his time in the Air Force during the Korean War, finishing as a survival expert at the Cold

Weather Survival School that preferred using the deep winter snows around McCall, Idaho.

“We were training air crews for Africa and Ivy Leaguers for the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA),” he said. “Those Ivy Leaguers thought they were special, but they didn't know a goddamned thing. It was truly unbelievable.”

After being discharged he joined up with the



McCall 1950s. Spotter Ray Beasley (MYC-52) far right. (Courtesy R.Beasley)

U.S. Forest Service smokejumpers at their base in McCall. He first jumped fire into the igneous rock west of McCall with an experienced man, a big Swede who was a World War II veteran. It was an easy fire with a short distance to pack out the tools and chutes.

The Swede showed him his system for packing out tools by using the ax-head side of one Pulaski to cut off the shovel heads and the head of the other Pulaski, and then beating the cross-cut saw to useless, pitching it all downhill.

“My eyes were as big as could be,” Beas said.

When the ranger showed up to check the fire and saw the broken tools, he fired the experienced jumper but kept Beas.

At McCall, Beas met **Thomas C. “Shep” Johnson** (MYC-56),¹ who had returned home after five years a Marine, wounded in Korea, to punch cows on his uncle’s ranch. According to Shep, that uncle was “the meanest son-of-a-bitch there ever was.” Shep’s brother, a jumper since 1953, invited him in 1956 to come up to McCall to jump fire.

Shep told him, “Miles, what the hell’s wrong with you? I ain’t going to jump out of any damned airplane.” He got to thinking about it; then, “I told my uncle that I’m going to start jumping with the smokejumpers, but he didn’t believe me. We was in a truck going somewhere. I wanted to make sure I had a ride out of the backcountry.

“Earl Lindberg, an old cowboy, was my ride out to Weiser. So I told my uncle, ‘See that last cow? When it goes out of the gate, I’m history; I’m going with the smokejumpers.’

“Good God, anything was better than that. God, he was awful. Oh, he didn’t believe me. He thought I was bullshitting him, but I made damned sure I had a ride. It was the best move I ever made. I was antsy about it, because I didn’t know about jumping out of those airplanes. Scared me to death.”

Shep started liking his new job after his first fire jump with an experienced partner from Salmon, Idaho, named **Richard “Paperlegs” Peterson** (MYC-47), on a place called Ruby Mountain. Paperlegs was a veteran of the 82nd Airborne Division and one of the most interesting people he’d ever known.

“If I did wrong, he’d tell me. He was one of a

kind,” Shep explained.

Shep liked the way he and his fellow smokejumpers depended on one another. Some got to be unusually close working on the firefighting details down in Silver City, N.M.: “It wasn’t regimented down there like McCall, where they’d boot you if you screwed up.”

Shep never felt he was that good at being a Marine sergeant or cowboy or saddle bronc rider, but over the years he came to consider himself very good at organizing cargo and rigging that cargo under parachutes. Beas also got to know so much about parachute technology that by 1974, the year he ended his career at the U.S. Forest Service Equipment Development Center in Missoula, he fielded a new parachute system for smokejumpers.

By then he was a lot wiser than back in 1959 when someone asked him if he wanted to work in the winter months for the CIA. The deal was that he could come back to McCall and continue jumping fires in the summer months.

The only thing Beas wanted to know was, “How much does it pay?” When he was told \$850 a month, he said, “Sign me up.”

Shep knew that Big **Andy Andersen** (GAC-52), the timber foreman down at Silver City, had recommended him. “Andy was a tough son of a gun,” Shep said.

At 6 feet, 3 inches tall, Andy had trouble exiting the jump door of an airplane. Big Andy and a number of other jumpers had been out in Asia during the off-season helping the CIA. Shep said, “Beas and I went back to Washington together. I was out in the sticks and didn’t have any clothes. Beas said, ‘Don’t worry – they sent plenty of money to buy clothes,’ and they did.”

The joining of CIA requirements with Forest Service capabilities started after the abrupt ending of our nation’s World War II Office of Strategic Services (OSS) and in the rapid expansion of the CIA’s covert operations during the Korean War. Today, after involving 100 jumpers, it continues.

The CIA must have needed their skills in the fall of 1960 because Shep remembers: “In Washington we stayed there in the Marriott. When the bigwigs came to interview us, we’d still be drunk. They managed to get us together and get us out to the headquarters of the CIA. That was quite an experience.”

After so many years Shep has come to think about Beas in another way. “We were close, but he kind of dropped out of sight when he dropped out of the agency. Maybe all that stuff built up inside of him,” Shep said.

Now Beas has just told me he’s willing to sit for an interview about all that stuff.

The CIA

The CIA needed Shep and Beas² that fall to support the Tibetan resistance, which began before the covert operations in Cuba or Laos. The nexus of those later and better-known operations was explained this summer in the CIA’s own *Journal of Studies in Intelligence*.³ Timothy Castle makes the point that the many writings about the failed mid-April 1961 operation to land paramilitary forces in Cuba and overthrow Fidel Castro overshadowed assessments of another CIA plan, scheduled for the same week, to attack Soviet-supplied military stores and anti-government forces on the Plain of Jars in supposedly neutral Laos.

At the time the central figure in both plans, the CIA’s deputy director for plans, Richard Bissell, was expected to be President Kennedy’s replacement for longtime CIA Director Allen Dulles. Bissell had decided to use 16 World War II B-26 bombers in a pre-invasion attack on key Cuban communications facilities and airfields.

In addition to transport planes flown by half a dozen proprietary pilots to a secret training base in Retalhuleu, Guatemala, the 117th Tactical Reconnaissance Wing, Alabama Air National Guard—which had been the last U.S. Air Force unit to fly the B-26—provided 80 men in civilian clothes to serve as aircrew, armament specialists and maintenance men. Like everyone else, they were sworn to secrecy.

In March 1961 the rebel air force and their American trainers moved from Retalhuleu to a secret facility at Puerto Cabeza, Nicaragua. One of Bissell’s staff came down from the CIA’s Air Branch in Washington to become base chief in Nicaragua. His name was **Garfield Thorsrud** (MSO-46) and he “quickly became an essential link between the field and headquarters.”

Thorsrud was a veteran of CIA proprietary air operations conducted during the anti-Sukarno government in Indonesia⁴ and in China during

the Korean War.⁵

Thorsrud was the person who used early-century travel photos and maps to select two jump spots in Tibet for insertion of two native radio teams, trained by the CIA, flown by B-17 from East Pakistan and delivered in 1957 by parachute out a Joe hole cut into the belly of the aircraft.⁶

Althar and Lhotse, comprising one of those radio teams, met the young Dalai Lama’s group fleeing for the border with India, and provided the necessary communication through President Eisenhower to get India’s clearance for His Holiness to enter⁷ the neighboring nation.

The radio team also brought 300,000 rupees in Indian currency, since Tibet’s currency would no longer have any value. Those rupees, parachuted in on a yellow canopy, were divided so that 200,000 went to support the Dalai Lama’s party in India, while the rest stayed behind to support a growing resistance.

After the Dalai Lama’s escape, Thorsrud continued working in support of a Tibetan resistance operation that required longer-range C-130s, the training of aircrews, and paramilitary training of more than 200 Tibetan resistance fighters at Camp Hale high in the Colorado Rockies.

Thorsrud had been a Missoula-based smoke-jumper.

As he graduated from the University of Montana in the spring of 1951, he was asked to come early out to the Nine Mile training facility to help train two CIA agents. After the beginning of that regular jump season, he and nine other Missoula-based jumpers were recruited by the CIA.

Six went to Taiwan with Thorsrud. Three, including **Art Cochran** (MSO-42), disappeared elsewhere.

Cochran had started that summer as Nine Mile’s base manager. He had served through World War II as the jump programs point of contact for Operation Firefly, defending against the Japanese fire-balloon threat. Inside the CIA he became closely associated with substantial agency training capabilities on Okinawa, where he spoke the language fluently.

After being seriously injured, he turned CIA logistician in Cyprus and Northern Iran.

Of the other nine recruited for the Korean War, six made careers of the CIA. Thorsrud got

out and came home to join the Montana Air National Guard. While flying F-100s out of Washington, D.C., he got recruited back into the agency as an air operations officer.

Thorsrud acquired enough responsibility to be mentioned as the staff officer in Castle's article who reacted to Kennedy and Bissell's last-minute halving of the 16 B-26s painted with Cuban Air Force colors, saying, "This is unbelievable!"

He was as surprised as anyone when machine guns mounted on a Cuban T-33 wreaked so much havoc. Were he still living, Thorsrud would be one of the few able to explain the decision made a few days later to cancel attacks into Laos by another 16 B-26s out of Takhli, Thailand.

Nine thousand miles separated the two air operations. The first was slashed on April 15, the night before the planned Bay of Pigs invasion was to start. The second was canceled four hours from a scheduled April 17 takeoff. Nevertheless, all covert paramilitary ground operations for both operations went forward as planned.

Unlike the abrupt failure in Cuba, the quasi-military operations in Laos, commanded by diplomats in Washington, Bangkok and Vientiane, and managed by a couple hundred paramilitary officers, became a hard-fought economy of force operation, which relied on air support of all kinds.⁸

The CIA involvement in the conflict in Laos lasted for more than 13 years, involved many more smokejumpers as trainers, parachute dispatch officers, case officers, pilots and military group leaders,⁹ until the effort folded after the fall



Laotians trained by CIA in Smokejumper gear (NSA Files)

of South Vietnam.

Tibet

Could Shep remember the flights into Tibet?¹⁰

"How could you forget? You go up to 32,000 feet and depressurize at a lower altitude," Shep said. "All that country in Tibet is high. We'd drop down to 12,000 to 14,000 feet, and we'd be on oxygen. On those long flights, fuel got to be critical. In fact one of them returned and landed on the runway with no fuel at all because of headwinds.

"The pilots were really good. They were the best. They were Air America and Southern Air, and Bill Welk was one of the best of those. I'm glad I did that kind of work and survived."

Did Shep know about the yellow parachute rigged earlier to drop 300,000 rupees to the Dalai Lama's party as it escaped into India? "Impact parachute. Foot deploys ahead of the canopy," he said. "Drop high; open low. Keep out of gunfire."

What did Beas know about the yellow parachute? He explained that cargo leaves the aircraft on a reefer chute that "squids" toward the ground. A measured length of detonation cord extends below the load to an ignition shoe that ignites when the feeler hits the ground first.

The detonation cord blows open the low-opening parachute, which deploys into a canopy at the last moment. This permits high-altitude drops, with low-opening accuracy. He figured the man who devised the technology for the yellow parachute was Missoula jumper **Jack Wall** (MSO-48) from Havre, Mont., who entered the agency in 1951.

Wall entered the Missoula jumpers from the Merchant Marine. He was exceptionally good with knots and could make anything. Beas recalled that in Guatemala, if Thorsrud needed a mockup somewhere in the jungle, Wall could make it magically appear.

“They were really good friends, and Wall, being from Montana, was Thorsrud’s right-hand man,” Beas recalled.

Beas talked about the long flights in fully packed C-130s using old China Air Transport civilian routes, used by Claire Chennault “until he went belly up.” Big Andy worked as the communications operator on radio silence, but “keying a dull humming dash at pre-designated reporting points.”

When they cleared China, they’d make a final run over a drop zone in Tibet. “The CIA permitted only one pass, or we’d get our asses kicked,” Beas said.

On one run, after they cut the straps, the cargo hung up in the door after jumping the two 18- to 20-inch tracks along each side. The pilot decided to come around again, which took about two minutes. With adrenaline pumping, Miles and Beas and Big Andy muscled this huge load onto the tracks so it cleared the door.

“Back in Thailand, we got ripped by this Air Force Major, who later became a Two Star because he was getting ripped by the CIA,” Beas said.

Another winter night, one of the jumpers dropped his weapon as he approached the door. Beas recovered it, gave it back to him and saw the fear in his eyes. “Those kids were wasting their lives in a futile effort,” Beas said. That bothered Beas a lot.

There exists in the Air America-Continental Air Archives a two-page letter from Shep’s brother, **Miles Johnson** (MYC-53), to Asia aviation historian Dr. William Leary. Miles’ letter, written in 1992, lists the names of smokejumpers

who flew the China/Tibet C-130 run. The list included Miles, Shep, Beas, Big Andy, Paperlegs and six others, including **Yogi Eubanks** (IDC-54) and **John S. “Tex” Lewis** (MYC-53). Those two, along with Missoula jumper **David Bevan** (MSO-55), were later killed in Laos in a plane crash at the foot of a Karst formation.

Their three names are included with those of four other smokejumpers on a brass plaque at the University of Texas-Dallas, dedicated to 274 “air crew members and ground support personnel of Civil Air Transport, Air America, Air Asia, and Southern Air Transport who died while serving the cause of freedom in Asia from 1947 to 1975.”

Miles told how the jumpers returned as key personnel to their Forest Service units during fire seasons and returned to the Laos Project in September 1961 after the fire season. He added that several smokejumpers remained in agency employment and formed the nucleus of air operation personnel employed by the agency in Arizona.

“That began a whole new series of projects for quite a few of us,” Miles said. He estimated for Dr. Leary that after 1961, about 50 smokejumpers took part in one project or another all over the world, but mostly in Southeast Asia. He also made reference to a photo negative he had included of a group of men in parkas under the nose of a B-17 with Fulton Skyhook installed.

That negative is missing from the file with the letter, but exists as the photograph central to the book, *Project COLDFEET: Secret Mission to a Soviet Ice Station* by Dr. William Leary and Leonard LeSchack.

Five men in the picture, including Thorsrud, are former smokejumpers. The B-17, listed as N809Z, arrived in August 18, 1961, as Intermountain’s first aircraft transferred from CIA aviation assets at Tainan, Taiwan.

En route it had paid a visit to Lockheed’s Skunkworks in Burbank, Calif., and had the Fulton Skyhook installed on its nose.¹¹

One of the crewmen in the photograph, Missoula smokejumper **Bob Nicol** (MSO-52), said they later used the system to recover the frozen body of a U.S. scientist from his research assignment close to the North Pole.¹² One can see the same aircraft in action on the big screen, recovering James Bond and one of his beautiful women

friends, or their stunt doubles, in a raft from sea in *Thunderball*.

In place of the negative of B-17 N809Z, which was not filed with Miles' letter, there is a picture of six Laotians dressed in the gear worn by the four smokejumpers standing with Beas years earlier in McCall. 🗿

Endnotes

1. "There I Was" *Smokejumper Oral Histories*, by John Driscoll, Mansfield Archives, University of Montana
2. "Secret Mission to Tibet: The CIA's most demanding, most successful airlift," by Dr. William M. Leary, *Smithsonian Air & Space*
3. *From the Bay of Pigs to Laos, Operation MILLPOND: The*

Beginning of a Distant Covert War, by Timothy Castle

4. *Feet to the Fire: CIA Covert Operations in Indonesia* by Kenneth Conboy and James Morrison
5. *Raiders of the China Coast* by Frank Holober
6. *The CIA's Secret War in Tibet* by Kenneth Conboy and James Morrison
7. *Tears of the Lotus* by Roger McCarthy
8. *Shadow War: The CIA's Secret War in Laos* by Kenneth Conboy with James Morrison
9. *Air America Notebooks from the William M. Leary Papers*, Air America-Continental Air Archives On-Line, University of Texas-Dallas
10. *Missions to Tibet* by Dr. Joe Leeker
11. "CAT Air Asia, Air America – The Company on Taiwan III: Work for the U.S. Government," by Dr. Joel Leeker
12. "There I Was" *Smokejumper Oral Histories* by John Driscoll, Mansfield Archives, University of Montana

Lessons Unlearned—A Historical Prospective, Part I

by Karl Brauneis (Missoula '77)

Legalism, The Timeless Enemy

There is a pool of healing waters in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate called Bethesda. Tradition taught that an angel of the Lord would stir the waters at times and the first person who entered the pool after would be healed. Surrounding the pool were hundreds of the infirmed waiting for the waters to stir.

The Gospel of John 5 teaches that Jesus of Nazareth walked into this scene to focus on one particular individual. "Do you want to be healed?" Christ asks the invalid. "Yes ... but," is the response. "Then pick up your mat and walk."

Immediately the sick man was healed, gathered his mat and walked away.

Now, let me paraphrase what happened next. The religious leaders saw the invalid walking and asked, "Aren't you the sick man who can not walk?"

"Yes, that was me, but this guy came over and healed me." The religious leaders replied, "Well, he can't do that. It's the Sabbath and no one can heal on the Sabbath. We could stone you to death for this act of

healing. But, what we really want to do is kill the man who healed you for breaking the law in the first place. Now, tell us where he is."

The same fear of reprisal exists within the fire-fighting community today. The story today could read, *The recreation guard and I just initial attacked the fire and put it out at half an acre. It was spreading into heavy dry timber that was ready to explode. We caught it.*



Karl Brauneis (Courtesy K. Brauneis)

But where are your fire shelters?

No, you don't understand. We caught the fire and no one was injured.

But where are your NOMEX fire pants?

Look, we saved the government hundreds of thousands of dollars by putting the fire out at half an acre.

But, you are wearing aluminum hardhats and not the latest fiberglass hardhats prescribed by policy.

No, you don't understand. We put the fire out and no one was hurt.

Okay, let's see your red cards; we don't think you are qualified to fight a fire like this.

As a public information officer, I look closely at all photographs of firefighters before we post them on Inciweb. I do this to protect our firefighters from reprisal by overzealous bureaucrats. I check to see that every safety item is in place before posting. On media tours I check through the chain of command to make sure our firefighters are photo-ready before allowing the press to take pictures or interview.

While engaged in these acts of protection, I am very conscious of the words of Jesus in Matthew 23:4. In talking of the Pharisees, or religious leaders of the time, Jesus said:

"They tie up heavy, cumbersome loads and put them on other people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them."

I often tell our younger firefighters that the old hotshots and jumpers could out-dig them any day of the week. That gets their attention. Then of course I add, well, in part, it's because we didn't have to carry 40 pounds of extra mandatory safety gear on our backs.

I wonder how many bureaucrats could dig fire-line all day with 40 pounds of gear on their backs.

Some backpackers notified me late one Friday evening years ago of a fire just outside of the wilderness boundary on our district. I checked the weather for the next day. The forecast called for overcast skies, high relative humidity, low wind speeds and low temperatures.

Good news. I knew that two of our wilderness rangers were in the area about two miles from the fire. They each had a horse and pack mule with all the experience and tools necessary to put out the fire. I called them by radio early in the morning before their check-in time. I gave them the legal location of the fire, and the rangers said they would load up and be there in about an hour and a half.

I thought, *Great! That sure went smoothly.*

Then the curse of legalism raised its ugly head. One of the rangers called and said, "Uh, Karl, we don't have any fire shelters or NOMEX clothing. Is it still okay to put the fire out?" Of course, dispatch could hear all of the conversation. The fear that pervaded the organization post-South Canyon (1994) won again. I called the wilderness rangers off and ordered Fort Washakie Helitack.

So, what was the cost of legalism on just one incident? I figured the fire with two wilderness rangers at about \$400. The fire using helitack actually cost us \$14,000. Now, repeat that situation by the hundreds nationally and you can get some insight into the rising cost of fire suppression.

Finally, a picture of what legalism does over time. In 1960, the US Forest Service put about \$13 million more into the treasury than it took out. This is after a quarter of the receipts had already been taken out to fund counties for schools and roads. These were also silver-standard dollars and not the "funny money" of today.

Yes, there were problems in 1960, but by and large, the forests were healthy, the fires were put out, recreation sites and roads were built, and the forests were productive. Now compare that picture to today. And that, fellow firefighters, is the true cost of legalism to both a forest and a society.

At the time of Jesus, a Jew had more than 600 laws to which he had to adhere on a daily basis. I wonder how many rules have we, the patriarchs of the fire community, placed on our firefighters today. You see, legalism – like sin – is part of our default nature. We have to make a conscious effort to overcome it.

Forest Service Chief F. Dale Robertson once wrote of the time he was tasked to write a new policy for then-Chief Edward Cliff. Robertson wrote and brought the new policy to Chief Cliff, who read it and asked: "So how will this new policy make the job of the district ranger easier?"

Robertson confided that it didn't. He then went back and re-wrote the policy with the district ranger in mind.

Maybe it's time to re-evaluate our mandatory policies and revise them as optional for our firefighters. Maybe it's time to interject a little common sense with a whole lot of grace back into the entire natural resource management community. Just saying ... 🙏



BLAST FROM THE PAST



70 In Mass Fire Jump

by Jack Demmons (Missoula '50)

The Missoulian, July 9, 1949

A cloud of smoke over Blue Mountain southwest of the city Friday brought calls that there was a forest fire in progress and that the forest service should be notified. But the foresters already knew of the fire as they had started it.

The blaze was used in a 70-man practice by nearly all of the R-1 smokejumpers. The fire was started to test how quickly and efficiently the jumpers could put it under control. The men bailed out of two Johnson Fly Service planes.

A complete fire camp was dropped to the fire about eight miles SW of the city. Coming down by parachute was everything needed to set up housekeeping in the woods.

The blaze was about seven acres when first hit by the smokejumpers and they had it under control in about two and a half hours.

Fred Stillings, aerial fire control chief for the region, was in charge. He said that besides proving the jumpers knew how to handle a fire, it disclosed evidence that the woods are dry enough to burn.

The jump was a graduation exercise for the smokejumpers. All of the men have completed training at Nine Mile and are ready to go on calls throughout the region. During the next week they will be assigned to woods jobs at which they will work until awaiting calls.

The jumpers have not yet made an actual fire mission in this region. An eight-man crew that has been in New Mexico since May is returning Monday and has already made several fire missions. 🍄

The fire season of 1949 was the second most active year for the smokejumpers since the beginning of the program. It also will be remembered for the Mann Gulch Fire that claimed the lives of 12 smokejumpers and one fireguard who was an ex-smokejumper. (Jack



Leg Snapped As Jumper Lands Hard

by Jack Demmons (Missoula '50)

The Missoulian, May 11, 1944

Robert Severy, Forest Service parachute jumper, sustained a fracture of his left leg in landing late Tuesday in his first jump at the Nine Mile Field.

Severy, who is 23 years old, and a regular Forest Service squadron member, encountered a down draft as he stepped from an airplane at the height of 1,500 feet. He was dragged into young growth timber and struck a tree and the ground simultaneously to suffer the injury. He is the son of Dr. and Mrs. J.W. Severy

Forty members of the parachute squad made their first jumps in training Tuesday with Severy being the only casualty.

A new innovation being used is the voice amplifier through which the flight supervisor, Frank Derry, tells each man what to do as he comes down over the field. It is believed that through such expert advice accidents can be materially reduced. 🍄

Veteran Jumper Joins Parachuters

by Jack Demmons (Missoula '50)

The Missoulian, May 12, 1944

Glenn Smith (MSO-40), who was a Forest Service parachute jumper with the first squads in this region in 1940 and 1941, has returned to duty.

He had been at San Diego, assigned to inspection of parachutes being manufactured for the use of the War Department during the past two years.

More than a dozen Forest Service jumpers are members of the current squad, the remainder Civilian Public Service recruits. 🍄

40 Years A Smokejumper

by Darryl Christian (North Cascades '74)

It is said that “you can leave smokejumping, but smokejumping will not leave you.”

Thanks, NCSB, for letting me put on a jump suit at the 2014 NCSB Reunion. I showed several old jumpers my picture during a recent dinner and asked why they didn't buy any raffle tickets so they could be part of the demonstration jump with the base jumpers. I told them I had won and got to jump that morning. They believed me for a minute (or less).

When asking “How many past jumpers would have bought a raffle ticket?” at the barbecue the night before, they all agreed that everyone would have bought a chance to jump again.

A rookie year to remember

If your rookie year was as eventful or better than mine, we would all like to hear about it.

At the beginning of rookie training in June 1974, there were more than 20 rookies. Half the rookies trained would be going to La Grande, Ore., and the remainder would call North Cascades Smokejumper Base their home.

It was so hot that summer that during letdown training, guys were trying to stand in the shade of the poles and even in the shade from the guide wires. During calisthenics the drill instructors were encouraging rookies, daily, to give up and quit. There were usually one or two who never showed up the following day. We all thought, *What is this – Navy SEAL training?*

The assistant manager, **Mike Marcuson**, (NCSB-64), was critiquing our first jump with us by reviewing videotape. He completely lowered the self-image of one of the rookies by yelling at him, “Ron, I have three words for you: HEAD UP A--.”

Then he went on to the next jumper's critique. We were all shaking in our boots that Mike would next be chewing each one of us out, and down the road we would go.

Our practice fire jump included lunch. We were told the stew cooking over an open fire was delicious. We later discovered the stew was made from

cow patties, slow cooking all morning in the large kettle. What a treat!

I passed rookie training and had my first fire jump during a lightning bust in Redmond, Ore. My jump partner was **Ernie Longanecker** (NCSB-70). I was saddened to learn of his passing earlier this year.

We had a good laugh when a Redmond jumper asked if we check in with ranger stations using our first names rather than our last names. We later realized he was referring to the call in from “Jumper George,” whose real name was **Barry George** (NCSB-73).

We dropped two jumpers on a fire run to Lake Chelan in the DC-3. On the return flight to NCSB, most of us were sleeping as usual in the jump seats, put to sleep by the drone of the engines. I was awakened by others hooking up to the cable running the length of the plane's ceiling.

As usual, I thought they were pretending we had an emergency jump as older jumpers were always trying to prank rookies. In fact, this was no prank; our pilot, Ken Cavin, had a blown engine on the right side of the plane.

He shut that engine down and informed the spotter that he wanted all jumpers off the plane – knowing we would all love a free jump, and he would also be reducing the plane's load.

For being a rookie, I thought I had everything under control until I was tightening my harness leg straps. My legs were like rubber.

You would not have believed the jolt on our capewells when the prop blast (from engine on the left, at full throttle) opened our chutes. We were jerked horizontal and our hands – normally on our reserve parachutes – went directly to the capewells, thinking we could keep them from popping open. I remember looking back at the plane and watching the remaining six guys opening up. I thought I was in a World War II war movie with all of us exiting the plane at once.

I continued to watch the plane; as a rookie, I thought I would see the plane crash. What a bozo I

was, finding out later that the DC-3 can fly perfectly fine on one engine.

I did not know where we were, but one of the veteran jumpers was yelling “go for the road.” We were over pasture land, four miles south of Twisp, Wash., and landing near the road would mean we would not have to pack out very far at all. Our “emergency jump” really pissed off the other jumpers when we returned to the base, because we got a “free” jump and did not lose our spots on the fire jump list.

A call came to the base from the sheriff’s office Aug. 1. A young teenager had stepped on glass and his foot had become infected. His family had been camping in the Pasayten Wilderness, eight miles from the trailhead.

Since I was lucky enough to be number six on the jump list, I was on the rescue jump. We dropped a stretcher that had harnesses to wear; these attached to extended poles of the stretcher. Two of us in front and two in back carried the stretcher and traded off every mile with the two other jumpers leading the way.

To show how “macho” we were, **Bill Moody** (NCSB-57) suggested we trot in the last 200 yards to the trailhead. I think we did impress the 13-year-old boy we had transported. Again, the guys that were back at NCSB were pissed. We did not lose our places on the jump list.

Have you ever heard of getting three fire jumps in 24 hours?

The siren went off during the last 10 minutes of our lunch Aug. 2. Running to the ready room I was still on the top of the jump list and eight of us jumped a fire just north of Winthrop.

We worked all afternoon and were relieved by a district crew. We made it back to NCSB to eat a dinner “Mean Jean” had saved for us. The rest of the jump base had jumped out that afternoon, and we were told to hurry and eat as there were more fires.

Before dusk, **Jerry Bushnell** (NCSB-72) and I jumped a two-manner near the Loup Loup Highway that leads from Twisp to Okanogan. We worked until shortly after midnight and were relieved again by a district crew. We returned to NCSB and even got to sleep in our own bunks that night.

Wow – two fire jumps in one day!

A backup group of jumpers showed up from

Redmond after breakfast the next morning. The siren went off again around 10 o’clock, and I got to go again with seven other guys, including several from Redmond.

It was a great jump into the Pasayten Wilderness for three days. I got to renew friendships with several jumpers I knew from Redmond – including **Doug Houston** (RAC-73) and **Karl Petty** (RAC-71). I had been on the Redmond suppression crew the previous two years (1972-73) and knew many of the jumpers.

During the three days on this fire, I learned as a rookie that one should bring some fishing line and a hook; I also learned how to use an empty pound cake can as a spinning reel. Also, I learned to always carry a small bottle of Tabasco sauce to make meals edible.

So, if you can top three fire jumps in 24 hours and not miss a meal at the mess hall AND sleep in your own bunk between fires (as a rookie), you need to write about it. I believe veteran Jerry Bushnell was my jump partner on the three fires also!

My 23rd and last jump of the season was a “project jump.” The project was to clear the trail from Libby Lake to its trailhead.

I was pretty nervous because my partner was the base manager, Bill Moody. Bill said the lake was at such a high elevation and the air was thin that we should probably jump single stick.

The jump was on Sept. 12, 1974, and at the barbecue at the NCSB 75th anniversary reunion Sept. 12, 2014 (exactly 40 years later), I asked Bill if the air was really that thin, or did he not want to be in the air with a rookie at such a high elevation.

Bill just laughed, but I think I already knew the answer.

Even though I had a career as a school teacher for 39 years, smokejumping is still the “best job I ever had.” I can be in my back yard when a plane or helicopter flies overhead, and I instantly look for jumpers to be coming out of the plane or reminisce about a helicopter picking up a crew from a forest fire.

So, as I said, “you can leave smokejumping, but smokejumping will never leave you.”

By the way ... I intentionally left out some other highlights of that summer. I could share them with you at the next reunion. Also, please bring back the Three Fingered Jack’s Saloon to its original 1970s vintage. 🍷



SOUNDING OFF from the editor



by **Chuck Sheley**
(Cave Junction '59)
MANAGING EDITOR

A Visit With My Black Son

BEING A TEACHER and coach has some of the best rewards of any job. They come from having the opportunity to work with some great young people. As a coach I developed some life-long friendships as I worked with some of my athletes for six years in Junior and Senior High School. Others then worked on my fire crews for an additional two or three seasons, so I had close to eight years working with some students.

I just visited with two of my ex-cross country runners this last month. One lady is a police dispatcher during a night shift and coaches the high jump during track season.

The other, Kurt, is a type-A person who can be described as a “head hunter,” a person

who streamlines business operations. He was telling me about his first season as a cross-country runner. Kurt had transferred from the “other” school in town and wanted to go out for a team in order to make some friends. His first races were not exceptional, but he was a tenacious competitor. As we had lunch he related that after a mediocre race, I told him “that he could really be good” and to stick with it. He became one of the top runners in the north section and went to Oral Roberts on scholarship, where he competed for four years. He’s still at it, 40 years later but has switched to “Cross Fit” competition. A couple words of encouragement, remembered 40 years later, paid a big dividend.

Just last week (June 2015) I had a message on my office phone: “Coach, this is Dennis, my Mom has passed away and I’m in town for a few days. Let’s have coffee and catch up.” Wow, it had been 17 years since I last saw Dennis at the wedding of one of my track sprinters. I’m glad I’m still around as I always wondered what had happened to “my black son.” That is what the other guys in the PE Dept. called Dennis, as he was one



of those kids who worked with and for me for almost ten years, counting his time with the USFS.

Dennis was one of our African-American kids at Chico Jr. HS, and I first met him teaching 7th grade PE a long time ago. He came into the PE office and told me that there were a couple of students

who were stealing out of the clothing lockers while the students were showering. Students rarely do this, as they don’t want to be called a “nark.” I appreciated this as I wanted to crack down on the thieves. I always had two or three students working for me as aides and with the athletic program. Trustworthy help is appreciated and needed. Dennis became one of my “helpers.”

After three years he went on to Chico HS and I got him a job with one of the summer programs that provide work for disadvantaged youth. He came from a large family and was on his own a lot.

I had Dennis digging a long jump pit during the heat of the day one July. If you work outdoors in Chico during the summer, temps over 100 are common and the body will adjust. One supervisor for the school district turned me in

for working a “student” under those “extreme” conditions. I figured this was just preparing him to do better in later life. It did.

When Dennis got out of high school, he trained and fought fire for two seasons on one of my Type II Crews from the Mendocino NF. That program was great as it allowed an 18-year-old to start a job resume from scratch. In addition, I think that every young person should fight fire for a season. They will have a greater appreciation for food, water, and a good bed after that. I’ve seen these kids come back after a fire season grown up by more than three months and with a confidence in their abilities and themselves.

I like to think the fire crew program offered Dennis a window out of his living situation. One night I got a call for three crews and I drove by Dennis’ house to pick him up, as he did not have a phone. I knocked on the door at 2:00 am, and this very large black man answered the door. He was one of Dennis’ brothers and stood a good 6’3” and had the tattoos and muscle developed by a stint in one of our state prisons. In about ten seconds, I recognized Larnel as one of my students at Chico Jr. High School. Jeez, he was 10 times bigger than the kid I had to handle in a fight years ago.

Larnel was a troubled kid who had a hair trigger. One day I had to break up a fight involving him. He had taken off a large, thick leather belt with a wicked buckle attached

and was swinging it at the other kid. In addition he had some pointed-toe boots—he was well armed.

Usually fights stopped when I told them to do so. Not here. Larnel was focused and out of control.

This was one fight I was not going to approach from the front, as I didn’t want to eat that belt buckle. I caught him from behind, grabbed the belt, wrapped it around his body pinning his arms to his side. I cinched the belt buckle up and hauled him off to the Vice Principal.

The Larnel I was looking at that morning could have done the same to me in about two seconds. We looked at each other for a few seconds and then he turned and got Dennis out of bed. So much for students whom I didn’t have much success with. I was glad to get out of there.

After two seasons I got Dennis a job on an engine crew on one of the most isolated districts in the forest. He was in the middle of nowhere. He did not have a car or driver’s license, so was totally stuck at the station. All the way through school, Dennis was classified as “Special Ed” because he did not have good reading and writing skills. I had heard that he was having some trouble at the station, so I drove over the mountains three hours to see what was going on.

The engine foreman said that Dennis didn’t “fit in” and was unable to handle his paperwork, etc. I told the fore-

man that Dennis had trouble reading and writing, but could take any tests, etc., if they were given to him orally. It was easy to read between the lines here. It was not a reading problem, there were racial overtones. This part of the forest was pretty “redneck” and might have been confused with Harlan County. I made several of those six-hour trips to take Dennis to town to get groceries, as no one would give him a lift. Dennis got a low work rating from the foreman. I knew that was not the case.

I was able to get Dennis transferred to the district warehouse, where the boss was very happy with his work ethic and gave him outstanding ratings. So much for the engine crew. He went on to spend a couple seasons with the Mendocino Hotshots before leaving the Forest Service.

After a time I had Dennis apply for a custodial position with the school district. Decent pay, good work hours and medical coverage. I knew he could outwork all the custodians we had on campus, but he was unable to score high enough on the written test. I appealed to the powers that be, telling them that being a good worker is more relative to the job than reading skills. No luck—that’s what the job description said and there would be no exceptions!

Well, on to Plan B. We got a new School Superintendent. Having been through many Superintendents, I knew that they always were open to “suggestions” the first weeks on the

job. I made an appointment with Dr. Bob, told him this would be an excellent opportunity to bring in a minority hire, which we really needed in our district, and also get a great worker. Dr. Bob instructed the Classified Personnel Dept. to give Dennis the test orally. Dennis scored at the top, which I knew he would.

After several years he married a great lady and moved on. Many times I wondered, “what ever happened to Dennis?”

Back to the present. After a good visit with Dennis, I found that his wife is a very skilled accountant. They moved to the Bay Area where she was with the University of California. Dennis worked

various jobs in fire and custodial. He is working in Southern California, as his wife is now Associate Vice Chancellor/ Controller at UCLA. Their son is taking fire science at a local community college and wants to fight wildland fire. In spite of a lot of obstacles, “my black son” has done well in life. That makes me feel good. 🙏

LETTERS TO SMOKEJUMPER

Rebuttal To Ram-Air Transition Column

This is in response to **Chuck Sheley's** (CJ-59) article on the U.S. Forest Service's transition to a ram-air canopy.

I would like to begin by thanking Chuck for making his point of view known, taking a stand on the issue and getting involved in the conversation – not just sitting on the sidelines. This open dialogue provides for us, as a community, the chance to air our points of view and thus give others the chance to point out flaws in our thought processes.

To start with, I have no dog in this fight other than the continuing reliance on smokejumpers as a “go-to resource.” And make no mistake, rounds and squares both are in this together. With that in mind, I have a few things on which to correct Chuck, if for no other reason than to make this conversation more in line with the reality of the modern wing and to provide a cleaner context for this discussion.

No. 1 on my list of issues with Chuck's article is his broad generalization that all modern squares are high-speed, high-performance wings. To be sure, the canopies we fly in the BLM are of a higher performance than rounds, though they are nowhere close to the canopies to which Chuck is referring.

What Chuck failed to understand is that there are many types of ram-air, as well as different levels of wing loading. Five-, seven-, nine-, 16-

and 26-celled canopies are all available, as well as elliptical and non-elliptical canopies, and they are all designed to do different things.

In general, the lower the cell count, the slower and more geared toward accuracy the canopy is. The higher the cell count, the faster and more aggressive the canopy, which is used for “swooping.” It is in this area of the parachuting world – where wing loadings are intense and cell counts are high – that we are seeing the alarming increase in injury and death rates.

To be clear, by comparing a swooping-type canopy to the BLM ram-air is nothing shy of comparing a bicycle to a fighter jet. The two types of canopies live in two separate worlds with mostly opposing goals. The BLM ram-air is designed to be flown slowly and offer descent rates that make rounds jealous. Ram-airs have the added bonus of being able to operate in high winds.

And yes, even though Chuck is skeptical of ram-airs jumping in winds of 25-30 mph, I can assure you that it happens and is, without a doubt, more effective than a round. In short the BLM ram-airs are wonderfully designed for both accuracy and soft landings and continue to improve.

Along these lines, I also take issue with Chuck's arguments on turbulence and flare timing. Turbulence is an issue for anyone in the air, whether on a round or a square. If you fly into a lee side or rotor effect on either canopy, you are in trouble,

yet Chuck makes it sound like only squares need to worry about this dangerous effect. I would counter by saying the reason lee sides and rotor effects are so dangerous is that they compromise the energetic connection between the canopy and its pilot by creating slack in the lines, which leads to a malformed canopy that can't do its job (slowing a fall).

With this in mind, a well-educated aeronaut will see that, in actuality, a square is better able to handle this lee side condition than a round. This is because with a square you are able to "re-energize" the tension in your lines more effectively than on a round.

This is done through a quick increase in the angle of attack of the wing, which will cause the canopy to lift away from the jumper, re-asserting the line tension, along with the added bonus of actually being able to fly away from the hazard.

Brian Germain – whom Chuck quotes often in his article – talks at length on this subject, but maybe Chuck skimmed passed this point. Chuck also leaves the reader with a sense that the only way to land a ram-air is with a full-run dynamic flare. This is a far cry from our reality.

While it is exactly true for a 75-square-foot elliptical canopy, it is far from true for a 375-square-foot, seven-cell non-elliptical canopy, which is what we fly. We can flare BLM canopies from many different settings and achieve highly acceptable landings that leave us ready to work hard without the dull aches commonly associated with a standard round landing. I think any current jumper would agree that squares on a whole land softer than rounds, period.

Chuck also refers to low turns and states that a smokejumper needs the ability to steer a canopy to the ground. I couldn't agree more. The ability to make heading adjustments all the way to the ground is essential for what we do. However, Chuck paints a picture of no turns below 100 feet for a Ram-Air.

That is categorically untrue. We use what are called "off-hand turns" to avoid hazards all the way to the ground. What the 100-foot mark is referring to is aggressive, full-glide turns that result in ungauged altitude loss that can compromise a soft landing.

In no way are we locked in with our sight

picture from 100 feet to the ground. On the contrary, we have many more options for correction on final than does a round. We must only choose the right tool for the desired outcome.

I would also like to remind Chuck that we boost Region 5 and Region 6 on a regular basis and our canopies perform for us and the programs. And you would be hard-pressed to find country with more ridge jumps than in the Great Basin – ram-air country. So it seems Chuck is selling the ram-air's capabilities short with regard to tight spots and ridge jumps.

Chuck also raises the issue of moving jump spots to accommodate a ram-air. Yes, in some cases jump spots will need to be moved. I have never seen an instance in which moving the spot took away from getting to the line in a quick manner, especially if you take into account the time it takes to get cargo out of trees around a spot too small for a square.

What I have seen in my time jumping is being able to receive the cargo quickly, which makes up for the walk time and ensures a safe jump without injuries. A case in point would be a jump I was on in Region 6 when four rounds were thrown into a spot where the squares were not going to jump. Of these four, only one made it to the ground, and he had to be life-flighted out after the four squares jumped a giant meadow that was literally a 10-minute walk away.

We only jumped to provide EMT services since the four of us were the only EMTs on board. My point is, if they had chosen the big meadow to begin with, all of that would have been avoided. And if rounds are so good at low-level turns, how come they're in the trees so much?

Chuck also refers to the malfunction rates of rounds and talks about line-overs and inversions being practically non-existent. But I would like to remind him that there are other malfunctions, such as broken brake lines that are still far too common among rounds. And let's be honest and hard here – the round reserve system is dangerously inadequate. I would go so far as to say it doesn't work and should not be used.

The simple fact that a round cannot cut away a malfunctioning parachute is of serious concern. Without the air speed created by cutting away a malfunctioning canopy, a reserve cannot deploy

properly. Although serious compromises, like inversions, are virtually non-existent, they occur, and thus we must plan for and mitigate for them. And I believe the round reserve cannot accomplish this.

Chuck also points out that we should be concentrating on fire qualifications, not piloting a canopy. I can see the reasoning behind this. I would say the two BLM bases accomplish both, and it shows in our qualifications. What Forest Service base can say it has 30 percent of its jumpers qualified as ICT3, or 46 percent DIV, 87 percent crew boss, 73 percent ICT4, and 67 percent STCR as we can in Alaska? Among the BLM smokejumpers, we are first and foremost firefighters and have not lost sight of that.

I believe that the ram-air is a much superior canopy, but it must be said that with the added capabilities, it also has the added chance of flying yourself into trouble, and possibly big trouble. We handle this through rigorous training and a bar that is set high for anyone who wants to jump with us.

If the Forest Service transition is to be successful, it will need a much sharper focus on training and the ability to take control of its own hiring. Although the ram-air is highly capable, its pilots must be trained to a higher level than the Forest Service is used to seeing.

Along with that, the window of people who can successfully operate a square is smaller than

the window able to maneuver a round. This means that without the support to train in a high-intensity manner and hire those best suited for the intricacies of flying in the tumultuous air found in the mountains, the Forest Service is bound to flounder in this process. However, with the right support by the upper levels, the jumpers in Region 5 and around the Forest Service country could, and must, become the best in the business.

As we move forward in this process, I think we need to remember that we will all succeed or fail together. So we must do diligent research before committing to one side or the other. There are pitfalls ahead of us with this transition. The sense I get is that the Forest Service program will either make or break us in this transition.

Those among the leadership at the Forest Service bases need to come at this with all their hearts and intellect. There are great chances available in this transition if they are seized upon and not simply carried out because the bosses above said so.

For example, when the BLM transitioned in the '80s, it changed our institutional culture over time from one where close was good enough, to it needs to be exact every time. We must constantly be improving ourselves and our capabilities. This required us to address both our hiring and our training practices, which has paid dividends in all aspects of our job and for those who use us.

—**Matt Oakleaf** (Fairbanks '05) 🦋

Responses To Square/Round October Article

Hi Chuck— First I'd like to commend you on your editorial regarding squares vs. rounds. This is a huge step forward in making the *Smokejumper* an unfettered source of information not constrained by the interests of government. Not to mention the cajones that were required. I don't know if knowledgeable observing and critiquing FS and BLM activities is presently in the NSA charter or not, but there is a need. There isn't much independent oversight in the area of parachutes, jumping operations, and proper deployment of jumpers.

In addition to smokejumping, I was a sport

jumper for a little over 20 years, with approximately 400 jumps on the squares of the day. I don't doubt that today's squares are much improved, but still require the same basics of parachute handling to arrive on the ground safely and precisely. That's where I'm coming from with these comments.

Segueing into the discussion of appropriateness of squares vs. rounds for Smokejumpers in the Rocky Mountains, it appears that there is general consensus that safe jumping under squares definitely requires more training than it does with rounds. I understand that current training

acknowledges this fact for rookies with 25 practice jumps required to qualify on squares vs. 15 for rounds. I haven't heard how many refresher jumps are provided for returning jumpers at the beginning of the season, and what interval without a jump triggers practice jumps. Currency is extremely important in flying squares, just as it is in flying airplanes. It's human nature to assume the same level of competency exists as before, even though we haven't exercised it in a while. Unfortunately, it just ain't so.

Arthur Hinaman's directive on the adoption of squares indicates that squares' safety record is comparable with or better than that of rounds. This data was based on some 5000 jumps with squares, and evidently all of the history with rounds. I make the assumption that the square-related injury jump history is taken from all regions of use, not only the Rocky Mountains. If so, this would tend to dilute the results if indeed jump spots in the mountains require more chute-handling precision than do jumps in open country, and I think that they do. If it turns out that an unacceptable injury rate with squares deployed in the Rockies, a likely fix is more training jumps. More training jumps equates to more cost, if the project can't absorb these costs, then maybe squares are the wrong answer.

But maybe there's another approach to training and currency that could reduce these costs. It might be simulation. I understand that the jumper project uses simulators to some extent now. I have no information on these devices or on their acceptance in the jumper community, but apparently not much emphasis is applied to these

for whatever reason. I do know that simulators are effectively used in other segments of aviation for the very same reason - to cost effectively train and maintain currency. I watch the Skyvan or the DC-3 making turns over the practice jump spot and can't help but think that a pretty sophisticated and costly simulator could be paid for with the fuel burn for those jumps.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this issue.

—**Dave Bennett** (MSO-61) 🦋

Chuck— Thank you for your opinion piece in the last *Smokeyjumper*. You brought up some really good points regarding the decision to go to the square chutes.

I particularly agree with your points on the wildland fire policy, especially #2 - #6. As a former smokejumper, District Ranger and Forest Supervisor, I found smokejumpers increasingly absent in the ICT's and higher levels of USFS management. If smokejumping becomes a career only, then the smokejumping program will increasingly become at risk as an expendable program.

You have to have been a smokejumper to fully appreciate the skills and values jumpers can bring to firefighting, incident management, line officers and national fire management. Lacking that, few will advocate for the jumper programs.

Line officers/smokejumpers walk a little taller, can speak truth to power and see a bigger picture.

—**John Berry** (RAC-70) 🦋

(John is Past President Pacific NW Forest Service Association Retirees. Ed.)

Longtime Jumper Shares President's PTSD Message

In the October 2015 issue of Smokeyjumper magazine, I had raised the issue of PTSD that is a potential concern for jumpers... especially those who have been long-term jumpers and/or those who have been unable to continue in jumping due to injuries, age or other factors. I extended an invitation to open a conversation on this issue in an attempt to better understand the relationship between smokejumping and PTSD.

As a result I received a very personal and heart-felt

*letter from **Jeff Davis** (MSO-57) in which he recounted his journey with PTSD. I asked Jeff if he would be willing to share his letter through this magazine, and he gave me the go-ahead and added that he's "an open book" and if his sharing might be able to be of help to someone else then "all the better." Jeff's letter is printed on the next page. Let's keep this conversation going.*

—Jim Cherry, NSA President

Hi Jim,
It was fun seeing you and so many others at the reunion. The event passed all too quickly.

Jim, you hit on something very important, even vital, to me in the October issue of *Smoke-jumper* in your Message from the President. You brought up the matter of suicide among long-term retired jumpers and suggested that it's "not greatly different from PTSD experienced by returning members of the military." This is something I can talk about from personal experience, where I'm on firm ground, so here goes:

Prior to 2011 I was of the rather naive notion that only combat vets could suffer PTSD. That year I attended a function that I'd been told was a free massage here in Silver City, that really was a treatment program for military veterans. I didn't know that at the time. I went in, innocently enough. Trained people there applied some techniques I now know were intended to release and relieve symptoms, and three hours later, I came back to the real world to find myself crying profusely and being cradled in the arms of a woman who had applied the treatment. I shut the whole place down. I was told in no uncertain terms that I had PTSD and it was controlling my life.

It was only then I realized I had severe PTSD. I entered into various programs, including one that was free to veterans, but cost me \$1200, and several years at the local Border Area Mental Health clinic, three times a week---all intended to help me overcome massive PTSD. They told me I was completely overcome by the disorder and, by then, I had no doubts at all myself.

Suddenly, I understood why the fire seasons here in Silver City in recent years had triggered intensively negative emotions in me and forced me nearly into hiding, as I tried fruitlessly to avoid the sounds and smells and feel of a hot going season. I jumped eight seasons down here as a buck jumper, as a squadleader, and as the foreman in charge.

Over time I've managed to deal with these symptoms fairly well as a result of all the professional help I've received over the past four years.

But Jim, when I was "dismissed to the sidelines," as you put it, disabled on my last jump and unable to work again, my identity as a jumper,

my identity as a man and my sense of worth all evaporated in a heartbeat.

I'd put my whole adult life and my entire soul into smokejumping. Not just the years I actually jumped as a "job description smokejumper," but the many years afterward I remained jump-qualified and worked in parachute and smokejumper gear R&D at MEDC.

I put everything I had into all aspects of smokejumping for 22 years and, when that all suddenly ended within a matter of minutes on a jump in the Nine Mile Valley in Montana on May 15, 1978 at 1020 hours, I became the hole in the doughnut and lost nearly all identity I had ever attained.

I could no longer hang with jumpers, and they were the only men I ever wanted to be with. I compared everyone to smokejumpers, and they always failed the comparison. I still do that; others still always fail.

I have yet to make a successful transition, as you talk about. My tiny one-room apartment here in Silver City is filled to the rafters with smoke-jumper memorabilia and photos.

A woman who interviewed me several years ago, whose article appeared in the October 2014 issue of *Smokejumper* magazine, mentioned it was obvious to her I still missed the job. Hell, it wasn't a job or even a career; it was a love affair. And I lost all that suddenly long ago—it was ripped right out from underneath me—and I've never really been the same since.

I've learned to mask that, cover it over, bury it deep, but the longing to get back on that horse that threw me, to be a jumper again and be with my brothers and fucking be alive again—that's never left me once in the 37 years since I was forced into a retirement I never saw coming and never ever wanted.

As to how men like me can be helped, or better, as to how we can help those who are right now facing that transition, I have no answers. No answers at all.

I just wanted to write you a personal note and tell you how your mention of this critical problem impacted me. I want to thank you. I damn near cried. You're the first man I've known who described what I'm feeling in print. I didn't think anyone understood what I've been going through

for years, however well I masked it. It's not always as intense as when I read your article, but it's always, always there.

I can attest from personal experience that what you've suggested is real. The combination of being a long-term jumper and being suddenly forced into retirement most certainly can result in PTSD. You mentioned you'd like to hear from those of us so affected and get a conversation going. It's a

timely and well-directed request. Thanks for your insight and sincere concern, Jim. I don't know what impact your statements will bring to others, but I was riveted by your words. It was the most significant thing I read in the entire issue of Smokejumper. Much of the rest of the magazine clearly targeted others still in the game, as it should, but this entry targeted me.

—Jeff Davis (MSO-57) 🦋

A Traveling Smokejumper Museum Exhibit—Bring The Smokejumper Story To Your Home Town

by **Chuck Sheley** (Cave Junction '59)

About six months ago Ben Johnson, Director of the Springfield Museum in Springfield, Oregon, contacted me concerning a smokejumper exhibit. Ben wanted to develop an exhibit for his facility that would tell the smokejumper story and run for a ten-week period.

After some initial exchange of information, I asked **Stan Collins** (MYC-67) and **Tommy Albert** (CJ-64) to help with the project. Both of these men live in the Eugene area and had been involved in the development of the Siskiyou Smokejumper Museum in Cave Junction, Oregon. The outcome was an excellent, educational exhibit telling the public about smokejumping.

A part of the mission statement of the NSA states that the National Smokejumper Association “is dedicated to preserving the history and lore of smokejumping.” How many people have you run into that do not know anything about smokejumping? If you are like most of us, it is a high number.

If we bring the smokejumper story to your community, it will be easier than getting the public to the few smokejumper exhibits available at this time. We need to educate the public about the job and value of smokejumpers in the wildland firefighting picture. A traveling museum/exhibit can come to

your community anywhere in the U.S.

The museum package will have 20 informational wall panels (30x30) complete with verbiage and photos. An example of a single panel can be found on the back cover of this issue. In addition, there will be a manikin with the jump suit, parachutes, and gear a smokejumper would wear. All of this should ship in a maximum of three boxes.

It is designed to show at a small local museum or historical society facility. One or two rooms will house the exhibit. It can be adjusted to the size of your facility.

The NSA Board of Directors asked me if this was a project that you would be interested in bringing to your community? I need to show an interest and need before continuing on the “Traveling Smokejumper Museum” project.

The ball is in your court. If you feel this would work in your hometown, contact your local museum person and see if they are interested in this outstanding exhibit. Once you have made a positive contact, it will be up to you, the NSA, and the museum person to work out a schedule and the details. Contact me if you are interested. Let's spread the word across the U.S. about the values of the smokejumper program and their place in wildland firefighting. 🦋

THE VIEW FROM OUTSIDE THE FENCE



by **Chris Sorensen**
(Associate)

BY ALL ACCOUNTS the reunion was a rousing success. I participated in tours of both the Missoula Fire Sciences Laboratory and the Missoula Technology and Development Center during the reunion.

During the fire lab tour, our group was allowed to enter the burn chamber between experiments. I was surprised at the number of different academic disciplines employed at the fire lab.

Our host for the tour of the Missoula Technology Development Center was **Bob Beckley** (RAC-83). **Tony Petrilli** (MSO-89) gave us a briefing on the development of the next generation of fire shelters and work on a new descender for helitack crews. I was surprised at how many diverse projects are underway at MTDC and how large the building is.

One of the highlights of the weekend was the talk on the Triple Nickles by Dr. Bob Bartlett of Eastern Washington University. He spoke to a standing-room-only crowd, including a group of active-duty Missoula jumpers.

Bartlett is an engaging speaker. I ran into him Thursday when he was helping to staff the merchandise tables. I jokingly advised him that he was in “enemy territory” on the University of Montana Campus. He was quick to come back with, “Yeah, but we (Eastern Washington University) beat the Bobcats twice last year!”

We both had a good laugh, and I could instantly tell he was a man of good will. I strongly suggest those of you planning future reunions to find a way to get Prof. Bartlett to your reunions to give his talk on the Triple Nickles. It is well worth it.

The U.S. Forest Service issued a Request for Information form Sept. 2, 2015, listing entities interested in supporting the seven former Coast Guard HC-130-H airplanes, of which the Forest Service is in the process of taking ownership. Within a few days, the Wyoming congressional delegation wrote to the Forest Service, expressing interest in having the entire fleet based in either Cheyenne or Greybull,

Wyoming.

In a Seattle *Times* article last summer, **Dr. Charlie Palmer** (MSO-95) referred to smokejumpers as “tactical athletes.” Quoting Palmer: “These aren’t people who ride around in trucks and squirt water on stuff – this is really demanding from a lot of different angles,” Palmer said. “You travel around, you have to perform, they’re getting very little downtime, they have nutritional challenges ... physically, you have to perform really well.”

In one study, Palmer screened wildland firefighters for attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). He said about 20 percent tested above the established cutoff score. “It’s very possible a high percentage of folks who work as wildland firefighters have ADHD,” he said. “If you start thinking about a profile, people with ADHD are very comfortable with risk. They like fast-paced environments. They like activity. They like moving around.”

The BLM is setting up a new hotshot crew to be billeted at Fort Huachuca in Sierra Vista, Ariz. The Army is providing quarters for the crew, and the BLM has a goal of staffing this crew entirely with veterans. No word on a name for the new crew.

According to NIFC, as of

Oct. 7, there have been 18 megafires. This includes complexes – counted as a single fire – and individual smaller fires.

This ties the record set in 2006 for the most megafires in one fire season – but we still aren't finished with 2015 season!

The definition of a mega-fire, incidentally, is a wildfire that has burned 100,000 acres or more. 🔦

Daughter Remembers More About Early Smokejumper/CIA Work

by Chuck Sheley (Cave Junction '59)

Martha Gonzalez, daughter of Richard "Paperlegs" Peterson (MYC-47), has been a long-time NSA member and supporter of the organization. She recently emailed me, below, in response to the article listing the smokejumpers who worked on overseas assignments. There is quite a bit of interesting history in this email that might be of interest to most of you.

Thank you for the online *Smokejumper Magazine* - July 2015 issue. As a child of Paperlegs (Richard A. Peterson, MYC-47), I really enjoy reading the history of the smokejumpers. I wish he had been around longer to share more of his experiences. This issue, I enjoyed your article "The Selected Few" and "The List." I really appreciate the list of books that mention CIA operations with smokejumpers. I used to keep in touch with **Shep Johnson** (MYC-56). I loved his stories as neither of my parents really ever wanted to talk about their experiences. As you noted in your article, **Gar Thorsrud** (MSO-46) was not one to talk either. My mother, **Ridgely Chapline Peterson**, was with him in Taipei in the early 1950s and she remained pretty silent about her CIA involvement.

Raiders of the China Coast - CIA Covert Operations during the Korean War by Frank Holober was published in 1999 by the Naval Institute Press. The book details the CIA-sponsored raids along the southeastern coast of China in the early 1950s. Page 101 mentions my mother, Ridgely Chapline. She was a fresh graduate from Wellesley College in Massachusetts when she joined the CIA in 1951. In the fall of 1952 she left for Formosa (Taiwan) for a two-year assignment with Western Enterprises in Taipei. Her passport lists her occupation as Geological Assistant. In later years she described her position as

with an export/import company. Gar indicated at her memorial service in 2004 that in her role, she used her geography degree to maintain the charts of ship movement. Page 207-208 mentions **Gar Thorsrud** (MSO-46) as "one of the smokejumper contingent, along with **Jack Wall** (MSO-48), **Herman Ball** (MSO-50), **Lyle Grenager** (MSO-48), **Jack Mathews** (MSO-48), **Wally Dobbins** (MSO-47), and **Les Grenlin** (MSO-46), all of whom had lived and worked, or at least trained, as smokejumpers in Montana. They had been recruited to help with the paratroop training and act as kickers on overflights. Gar was a true Viking, full of energy and good spirits and more than willing to meet a dangerous assignment halfway." The discussion of Gar continues. Prior to the memorial service, I never had realized that Gar was in the unique position of knowing both of my parents, long before they ever married in 1964. My parents' careers continued to overlap through the years leading to their wedding in 1964.

Regarding Taiwan - my husband's current job has us living on Sakhalin Island in Eastern Russia, north of Japan. As a child, my father's job took us to Okinawa. This year for my 50th birthday, I took a trip to Taipei to revisit the country my mother loved so much. I took several tours with a local company. They were fabulous. On the Ultimate Taipei - 10 key locations in 8 hours, they took us to an overlook near the Chinese Cultural University. What really caught my interest was an abandoned collection of American homes. Our guide indicated that the complex was constructed in the 1950s for the US military and abandoned in the 1970s. I had not expected to find such a strong link to the time when my mother lived and worked in Taiwan. It was quite exciting to find a true link to that time in the past. 🔦



Fred Donner (MSO-59)



Spud DeJarnette (MSO-49)



Willis Curdy (MSO-71)



Gene Hamner (MSO-...)



Missoula NSA

Photos Courtesy Fred...



J.B. Stone (MSO-56)



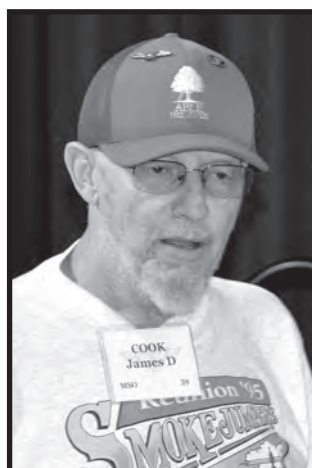
Fred Cooper (NCSB-62), Bob McKean (MSO-67) & Paul Chamberlin (MSO-71)



Dave Blakely



Bob Parcell (MSO-71)



Jim Cook (MSO-59)



Paul Evenson (MSO-73)



Mike Overby (MSO-67) & ...

Layout Design: John...



Bob Reid (MSO-57)



Bob Hewitt (MSO-56)



Harold Hoem (MSO-57)



Jim Cherry (MSO-57)

Reunion 2015

Ed Cooper (NCSB-62)



Ed Cooper (MSO-57)



Jack Sterling (MSO-66)



Jim Scofield (MSO-66)



Jeff Davis (MSO-56)



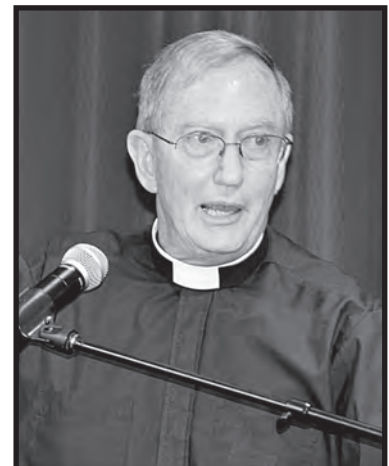
John Helmer (RDD-59)
Ann Kirkley (CJ-64)



Lon Dale (MSO-69)



Roy Williams (GAC-60)



Bill Duffey (MSO-71)



ODDS AND ENDS

by **Chuck Sheley**

Congratulations and thanks to **Kent Lewis** (MSO-62) who just became our latest Life Member.

A longtime Alaska Smokejumper and professional photographer, **Mike McMillan** (FBX-96), has released a book that anyone involved in wildland firefighting should have on their bookshelf. *Wildfire West, Wildland Firefighting Pictorial, Volume One*, was published in June of 2015. You will see 238 pages of some of the best wildland firefighting photos taken. Here's a Christmas Gift for all. There is a full-page advertisement and details in this issue.

Contact Mike at: spotfireimages@hotmail.com for ordering details.

Bob Harris (RDD-75): "On the subject of ram-airs and rounds, I just don't understand how they can ignore the fatalities that have been lost with the square program and continue on. Sounds like someone up high in the agency is pushing this forward no matter what. I spotted 'mixed loads' out of Redding jump country for 20 years and routinely changed jump spots farther away from the fire to better accommodate the square jumpers, and I don't remember them complaining about the change. If they want to jump that system, there is nothing wrong with that, but to push the system on all of the bases, that is what I don't agree with."

From *The Oregonian* by Joseph Rose 8/17/15: "Last week, **while researching of how the public first learned of Japanese balloon bombs designed to destroy Oregon woodlands during World War II, I learned 17 black soldiers calling themselves the Triple Nickels were among the first smokejumpers.**"

U.S. News 8/18/15: Two women have passed the Army's Ranger School, becoming the first females to complete the grueling combat training program. As part



of the Ranger Physical Standards, they had to do six chin-ups. Interesting that the smokejumpers still require seven pull-ups. That would translate to about eleven chin-ups. Wonder when someone will come up with a fitness test that relates to the job of firefighting?

Karl Seethaler (MSO-55): "Hi Chuck, I want to thank you on the great work you are doing for the National Smokejumper Association. I appreciate the *Smokejumper* magazine and was very pleased to attend the 75th Anniversary Reunion in Missoula last month. I particularly liked your article on 'The Selected Few' and 'The List' and how important that information is to our history.

"I worked for Air America from October 1964 to March 1973, stationed mostly in Laos, but also in Thailand, Vietnam and other assignments. I had a lot of flight time, spending more than a year of that time interval up in the sky and was quite fortunate to survive.

"I also worked in Peru from January 1989 to June 1993 under contract to the US State Department in support of the Peruvian Aerial Police in their drug interdiction program. I was a loadmaster almost daily flying from Lima, over the Andes, and into the Amazon rain forest where we flew point to point during the day and returned to Lima at night.

"My experience as a smokejumper has certainly been of significant importance to me."

Karl Brauneis (MSO-77): "The square parachute requires a lot more training and experience to 'fly' it and that is it in a nut shell. It is more like flying a chute then descending in a parachute. So, to me it is an Achilles' Heel for the smokejumpers. First, the BLM jumpers use the chute, so the Forest Service jumpers want to be as good and 'fly a chute' too. Achilles one. Second, internally, it is a badge of honor to be selected to 'fly' the new square, Achilles two. Now both

legs are hamstrung.”

Got a note from **Hank Brodersen** (MSO-54) with another example of the “small world” happening. Hank is a volunteer for a Senior Volunteer group in Leonardtown, Maryland. His “Boss” is Lori Jennings-Harris, Dept. of Aging and Human Services Director. Lori’s father, **Nelson Jennings** (PNOR-45), was a member of the Triple Nickles at Pendleton, Oregon, in 1945.

Peter Carpenter (RDD-59) has recently completed a series of interviews for *The Smokey Generation, A Wildland Fire Oral History and Digital Storytelling Project*.

Go to: http://thesmokeygeneration.com/?page_id=2379. This is an excellent interview and a great part of our history.

The July National Reunion was an outstanding event run and planned by a great committee headed up by **Jim Phillips** (MSO-67). Thanks again to the committee and Jim for all their hard work in pulling off one of the best ever reunions. Not to be overlooked, the full-page reunion announcement and photo arrangement done in each issue 18 months prior and up to the reunion was outstanding. That was the work of *Smokeyjumper* Photo Editor **Johnny Kirkley** (CJ-64).

Thanks goes to Johnny for his continued work on the magazine for each issue where he does the centerfold, back page and cover layouts.

Karl Brauneis (MSO-77): “Hi Chuck, I have been reading through the October issue. Outstanding! I am so glad you got the painting and that the Alaska jumpers pitched in. I was wondering, have any of the bureaucrat history revisionists apologized to you for their errors and misinformation on *Smokeyjumper* history? (*They won’t even admit to being in error. Ed.*)

“I once had to give a history lesson to the folks in the Washington office on hats. They had published some crap about why we would never again wear a military hat like the National Park Service. I took them back to the flat brim original cowboy hat - the Stetson Boss of the Plains (1870). I put in a Montana Peak to drain water and, wallah, you have the original cowboy hat that was adopted because of popularity as the Ranger Hat of the US Forest Service in the late 1890s (Forest Reserves) and stayed through the 1930s. The US Army adopted the

hat style in 1912.

“So, in this case, the Chief’s office was only about 40 years off. Of course, I had to send copies of Charlie Russell prints so that they would believe that cowboy hats were actually flat brimmed until the 30s when major changes were made and the Hollywood cowboy emerged.”

Starr Jenkins (CJ-48): “Congratulations on another outstanding issue of *Smokeyjumper*. That cover is the most beautiful expression of the action and feeling of greatest of jobs. Davis Perkins should be praised for doing such a good work.

“Your lead article (square/round chutes) is a magnificent coverage of that very important subject – so scholarly and erudite with all your marshalling of facts in favor of not abandoning the conventional and safe round chute.”

The Civilian Public Service jumpers kept smoke-jumping going during WWII and the 1943-45 seasons. There were approximately 220 volunteers during those three years. **Dick Flaharty** (MSO-44) has been my key contact in keeping up with these men.

Recently Dick gave me an update showing that the following are still living: **Virgil Miller** (MSO-45) age 93, **Ned Arnett** (MSO-45) age 93, **Luke Birky** (MSO-45) age 93, **Erling Gamble** (MSO-44) age 91, **Donald Hostetler** (CJ-45) age 89, **Dwight Hostetler** (MSO-45) age 89, **Dalmer Kaufman** (MYC-45) age 89, **Robert Marshall** (MSO-45) age 91, **Norman Moody** (MYC-44) age 92, **Roy Piepenburg** (MSO-45) age 89, **Marlyn Shetler** (MSO-44) age 91, **Gerhard Smeiska** (MSO-45) age 90, **Lowell Mumaw** (MSO-45) age 91 and **T. Richard Flaharty** (MSO-44) age 95.

John Hawkins (Unit/Fire Chief Cal Fire Riverside County): “Chuck, I received the October 2015 *Smokeyjumper* Magazine. I see that you continue to seriously help the NSA with informational sharing. You deserve serious commendation. I very much enjoy the magazine and thank you for sharing it with me.”

A Twin Beech aircraft piloted by **Byron “Skip” Knapp**, took off from the McCall Airport July 9, 1965, on a mission to drop four smokejumpers on a fire on Norton Creek, Payette National Forest, Idaho.

After dropping the four safely, the spotter,

Kenneth “Moose” Salyer (MYC-54), began dropping their cargo. During a low-level cargo run, the plane plunged onto a ridge killing Salyer and Knapp. At the request of his widow, Knapp’s body remains near the crash site, buried in the wilderness.

Chris Grove (MYC-83), who was, in later years, District Ranger on the Middle Fork District has passed along some interesting information. “It is odd, and sad, that all the time I was Ranger no one mentioned this crash or the grave at Indian Creek Guard Station. Don’t recall hearing about this when I was a Ned at McCall either.”

Chris then passed along an email from a lady who works at the Indian Creek Guard Station: “This summer Shawna and I went to find Skip’s

grave site and located the grave north of the Indian Creek compound. We showed it to Audra and Dave because a few people came to Indian looking for the gravesite and it was important that the checkers know where its at. In the beginning I thought the gravesite was further down where the trail led over the saddle but we found it was a lot closer. A few years ago a couple of hikers came through there looking for the grave and they sent me pictures of it.

“Out of respect we cleaned the site and talked about the repairs to the headstone, although it’s in good condition. Over the past years there were visitors who came looking for the gravesite.

“The gravesite is in the forest away from the airstrip and at the foot of the mountain. It’s in a clearing and in a peaceful location.” 🌲

NEW NSA LIFE MEMBERS SINCE JANUARY 2015

Thanks for your support!

#	Name	Base	Year
302....	DONACA.....RON.....	CAVE JCT.....	1960
303....	COLEMAN.....JAMES.....	MISSOULA.....	1953
304....	SCHMIDT.....JERRY.....	CAVE JCT.....	1962
305....	MANLEY.....JOHN.....	CAVE JCT.....	1962
306....	NEWMAN.....LARRY.....	MISSOULA.....	1960
307....	APICELLO.....MIKE.....	CAVE JCT.....	1978
308....	BETZ.....ZURI.....	NO CASCADES.....	2002
309....	DAVIS.....JEFF R.....	MISSOULA.....	1957
310....	SCHROEDER.....WILLIAM.....	MISSOULA.....	1961
311....	NYGAARD.....NATE.....	MISSOULA.....	1965
312....	ALIBER.....BOB.....	MISSOULA.....	1951
313....	RYLANDER.....NEIL.....	MISSOULA.....	1961
314....	GOSSETT.....LEE.....	REDDING.....	1957
315....	SHULTZ.....DAVE.....	MISSOULA.....	1961
316....	LEWIS.....KENT.....	MISSOULA.....	1962

Smokejumpers—The Mission Has Changed? Why?

Chuck Sheley (Cave Junction '59)

Over the past four to five years we've been told by administrative personnel that the mission or focus of smokejumpers has changed. "No more two-manners in the Bob!" Translated, that means they aren't going to go after the lightning fires in isolated areas. New Mission! Urban interface. We'll let those wilderness fires go! At the worst they can only become another Biscuit Fire and cost us half a billion dollars.

The date today is 8/18/15. I'm scanning the news. From "Wildfire Today" website: "And afterward Moses and Aaron went in and told Pharaoh, 'Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Let my people go, that they may hold a feast unto me in the wilderness.' Exodus 5:1

"When firefighting resources become stretch thin, struggling to contain dozens of large fires across the U.S., the Chief of the USFS usually sends a 'Let My People Go' letter to all USFS units. Occasionally it is referred to as the 'Moses Letter' since he reportedly said it a few thousand years ago."

From Chief Tom Tidwell (excerpts): "At this time, nearly all firefighting suppression capacity has been committed. There are over 25,000 inter-agency firefighters deployed for wildland fire suppression operations nationwide. If your employees are red carded and available, I ask that their first priority be providing assistance for managing wildland fires."

From U.S. News website: "Wildfires are putting such a strain on the nation's firefighting resources that authorities have activated the military and sought international help to beat back scores of blazes burning uncontrolled throughout the dry West.

"The situation is so urgent that the National Interagency Fire Center in Boise this week called in 200 active-duty military troops to help contain roughly 95 wildfires. It's the first time since 2006 that the agency has mobilized soldiers for fire sup-

pression.

"A lightning-sparked fire in Oregon's Malheur National Forest has grown to 63 square miles and destroyed at least 26 houses.

"In the Northern Rockies, so many wildfires have ignited this month that officials are letting some that might be suppressed under normal circumstances burn because manpower and equipment are committed elsewhere."

No more two-manners in the Bob? These two-manners are turning into 2,000-manners using up resources that could prevent other fires from becoming major fires.

A quick move to the NSA website checking the smokejumper status report: 86 smokejumpers available at various bases, 169 on fires. Wondering if those 86 available are being held in reserve? If we had more, would they be used more quickly on initial attack to prevent the large project fires?

How about adding 200 more smokejumpers and having them in the air 10 minutes after a fire is reported. A stitch in time? 🧐

Are You Going To Be "Temporarily Away"?

As more of our membership moves with the weather, we are getting an ever-increasing number of *Smokejumper* magazines returned by the post office marked "Temporarily Away." Since we mail the magazine via bulk mail, it is not forwarded, and we are charged first class postage for its return.

If you are leaving your mailing address during the months of March, June, September and/or December, please let Chuck Sheley know. He can hold your magazine and mail it upon your return *OR* mail it to your seasonal address. Please help us save this triple mailing expense. Or join our email list. Chuck's contact information is in the information box on page three. 🧐

Order using the form on the insert!

SMOKEJUMPER MERCHANDISE



With these fine caps, style is now your game

Choose from the smooth nylon of the **navy blue SMOKEJUMPERS cap** (top), the dignified **khaki twill U.S. Forest Service Smokejumpers** (right) or the unique design on soft **cotton rich royal blue logo cap of the history-packed Siskiyou Smokejumper Base** from Cave Junction, Ore. All feature attention-grabbing style and long-lasting construction! The SMOKEJUMPERS cap offers gold embroidery and trim with a velcro strap. The U.S. Forest Service cap has a brass buckle and green-and-white "sandwich"-style bill, while the Siskiyou's cap is a rich royal blue with khaki bill and brass headband buckle. Why not order one of each?

• SMOKEJUMPERS cap \$20 • USFS Smokejumpers cap \$16 • Siskiyou Smokejumper Base cap \$16



Compact technology: Your all-time NSA record

This handy thumb drive contains every edition of *The Static Line* (1993-99) and *Smokejumper* magazine (1999-present) ever published. Looking for an article about the early days of jumping? Trying to find a name of a smokejumper once featured in a story? Now you have total access. Makes an excellent, environmentally friendly gift! **\$24**

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Stylish SMOKEJUMPERS logo pin with our new logo looks fantastic on a cap or lapel. Stays secure with double-post fasteners. Shiny chrome finish. *Order several ... you get FREE shipping!* **\$3**



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Top of this license plate frame reads "Jumpin' Fires" while the bottom reads "Smokejumpers." White letters on a black background. Buy one for each of your vehicles, and save!



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Honeycomb pique ... it offers breathability and outright comfort – combined with sharp, crisp looks – better than anything on the market. You get it all with this outstanding polo-style shirt ... with the SMOKEJUMPERS logo embroidered on the chest in gold.

Thanks to its outstanding style, this shirt looks great on the golf course, tennis court or with a pair of cotton slacks. Wear it to "dress up" a pair of jeans. You can't go wrong! M, L, XL and XXL. **Navy blue only.** **\$32**



Are you still hangin' around?

These high-quality t-shirts feature spectacular artwork of an "old" smokejumper dangling from a tree. Ash-gray t-shirt will withstand many years of washing. Perfect for the gym, around the house or around town! M, L, XL and XXL. **\$17**



Our most popular t-shirt!

People love this shirt ... and the quantity we've sold proves it! Shirt features stylized "SMOKEJUMPERS" on the front with fabulous artwork of jumping action on back. Hazy light blue (M, L, XL, XXL) with short sleeves. **\$17**



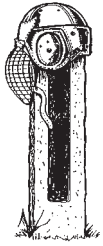
Movie inspired many dreams of smokejumping for young men

Loosely based on the Mann Gulch Fire in which 12 jumpers and a firefighter died, "Red Skies of Montana" fascinated many young men about life "out West." Released in 1952. **\$15**



Exhaustive DVD tells the story of smokejumping from beginning

"Smokejumpers: Firefighters From the Sky" is a definitive record of smokejumping, featuring 120 minutes of history from 1939 to 2000. Footage filmed at current bases and in the field. **\$15**



Off The List

Remember and honor fellow jumpers with a gift to the NSA Good Samaritan Fund in their name. Hard times can fall on many of us at any time. The NSA is here to support our fellow jumpers and their families through the Good Samaritan Fund. Mail your contribution to:

Chuck Sheley
10 Judy Lane
Chico, CA 95926

George “Ray” Hendrickson (North Cascades '51)

Ray died June 23, 2015. He was a paratrooper in the Army and jumped at NCSB during the 1951 season. Ray worked at the mill in Omak for 43 years and was married to his wife, Lorraine, for 60 years.

Richard L. Baumgartner (Missoula '58)

Richard died August 12, 2015, in Reedsport, Oregon. He served in the Army from 1955-57 and graduated from Michigan State University in 1959 with his teaching degree. Richard jumped at Missoula in 1958-59 and at West Yellowstone from 1962-64.

He taught for 33 years, three in Michigan and the remainder in the Eugene (Oregon) School District. Richard received two Master's Degrees from the University of Oregon. He was a lifelong hunter and holds four Boone and Crockett black-tail deer records.

Dick also was a tree farmer and planted over 20,000 on his Oregon properties, pursuing conservation and protection programs for wildlife and forestlands.

Richard S. Weaver (CPS-103 Administrative Assistant)

Richard died July 27, 2014, of heart failure at age 94. Richard was not a jumper but served as an administrative assistant to the program. He was a pilot and arrived in Missoula with his own open-cockpit biplane. In his spare time he gave pilot lessons to some of the jumpers. His wife, Virginia, served as camp nurse. She is still alive and residing in Sunset Retirement Community. Richard was a Mennonite minister, serving a number of churches in his day, and retiring in 2003 from Staunton Mennonite Church.

Chalmer C. Gillin (Cave Junction '45)

Chal died January 22, 2015. He graduated from East Conemaugh H.S. (Pennsylvania) in 1943 and was a member of the CPS-103 smoke-jumper unit during WWII. Chal was a member of the Church of the Brethren, one of the three “Peace Churches” that made up the majority of the CPS smokejumpers from 1943-45. 🕊

Good Samaritan Fund Helps Alaska Jumper and Family

The NSA has contributed over \$60,000 to help jumpers and their families in times of need. Recently Alaska Base Manager **Bill Cramer** (NIFC-90) made us aware of an immediate need of the McCall family. A check from the GSF was sent to Billy and Patty to help meet that need.

Thanks to your generous donations, the NSA will continue to quickly respond to the needs of smokejumpers and their families. In the response below **Billy McCall** (FBX-12) thanks all of you for your help.

Dear National Smokejumper
Association,

On behalf of the McCall Family, we would like to extend our warmest thanks for your kindness in donating to us for our son, Loudon Emery. Loudon spent five weeks in the Newborn Intensive Care Unit at Providence Hospital in Anchorage for a condition called Imperforate Anus, caused by a genetic defect called DiGeorge Syndrome.

In the hours following his birth in Fairbanks, we were surprised to learn

that our son had this condition and was required to be flown via Medevac jet to Anchorage for surgery.

We were just released from the hospital on August 19th and have made our way home to Fairbanks with our healthy little boy. We are so grateful for your support, as we will no doubt have medical bills to cover as well as the cost we have incurred from spending five weeks away from home.

The Alaska Smokejumpers have been a steadfast group that supported me in staying with my son in the NICU, while he was admitted, and advised me not to worry about the time off incurred. I can't thank them enough for being supportive.

I am honored that you have awarded me a membership in the National Smokejumper Association and will continue my membership in years to come. I will be proud to have my membership and donations go to another smokejumper family in need in the future. This

resource is a Godsend and will not be forgotten.

Sincerely,
The McCall Family
Billy, Patty and Louden 🙏

Boise Jumper's Son Injured

On Wednesday September 23rd, 2015, five-year-old Max, son of **Joe** (NIFC-06) and Courtney **Wyatt**, was riding his bike home from school when he was struck by a minivan. Although he was wearing his helmet, he sustained multiple injuries and was in critical condition. He went into surgery shortly after arriving at the hospital to remove his spleen. Once he was stable, he and his mom, Courtney, flew to Primary Children's Hospital in Salt Lake City, UT with dad, Joe, following shortly after.

Max suffers from a collapsed left lung, bruised right lung, chest wound, broken ribs, broken pelvis, broken left leg and possible other broken bones.

The NSA was able to respond quickly to the needs of the Wyatt family with a donation from the Good Samaritan Fund. 🙏

NSA Good Samaritan Fund Contributions

Contributions since the previous publication of donors October 2015

<u>Donor</u>	<u>In Memory/Honor of</u>
Victor Childers	Dayton Grover (MSO-55)
Gary/Margaret Gibson.....	Dayton Grover (MSO-55)
Staci Robertson	Dayton Grover (MSO-55)
Margaret Parrish.....	Dayton Grover (MSO-55)
Michael McGinnis	Dayton Grover (MSO-55)
Robert Merrill.....	Dayton Grover (MSO-55)
Lee/Sara Howerton	Dayton Grover (MSO-55)
David/Francis Jones	Dayton Grover (MSO-55)
Dave/Lucy Downs	Good Samaritan Fund
Melinda Shaver	Carl Shaver (MYC-52)

Total funds disbursed to smokejumpers and families since 2004 - \$68,540

*Mail your Good Samaritan Fund contributions to:
Chuck Sheley, 10 Judy Ln., Chico, CA 95926*

Wally Dobbins/CIA/Smokejumper

by Pete Dobbins

Some of what I recall my father, **Wallace “Wally” Dobbins** (MSO-47), elaborating about his experiences and work for the CIA, I describe below. It was challenging to depict the content and timeline of his work for the “agency” since he shared just bits and pieces of his total experience with the agency because his work for them was intermittent. I left out names of most individuals he worked with in the “agency” as I am not sure if they would want to be identified.

Recruitment and Initial Training

Wally was recruited to work for the agency in 1952. Like other smokejumpers, he was hired as a “kicker” to provide parachute delivery of cargo and personnel wherever needed.

My dad described how someone from the agency showed up at the smokejumper base in Missoula and asked if he would be interested in working overseas. He was not told the nature of the work, but accepted the offer anyway. He traveled within a week to Washington, D.C., for his initial agency training.

When Wally arrived in D.C. he was told to rent an apartment and wait for someone to contact him. He waited a month before being contacted and later realized the wait period was part of his training to see how he would handle idle time.

During his training in Virginia, he learned about escape/evasion and working with explosives, and learned surveillance and spycraft techniques in Washington, D.C. This orientation seemed to be the introductory training that all agency-recruited jumpers received. I think it lasted three months.

Wally was married to my mother prior to his recruitment into the CIA, and their relationship would factor into my father's work from time to time. Something Wally had never learned was how to use a typewriter. He struggled with this dur-

ing his training when he was required to generate daily typewritten reports.

Wally said he worked well into the morning hours to type reports and wasn't getting much sleep. My mother was an expert typist, so it didn't take long for my dad to put two and two together and have her travel to D.C. to stay with him.

Wally related how he created a hidden compartment in his jacket and brought his handwritten notes out of the CIA's training facility back to his apartment at night, where my mother would type up the papers. In the morning Wally would return to the facility with beautifully typed reports, which he smuggled back in with his jacket. My mother told me years later that dad's agency instructor in D.C. commented to him about how miraculously his typing had improved.

Indonesia

When his agency training concluded, Wally was assigned to travel to Indonesia with another recruited jumper, **William “Bill” Wood** (MSO-43). Bill was to establish a parachute loft and my dad was to organize jump and cargo training for the Indonesians. For whatever reason, the mission was canceled.

Formosa (Taiwan)

Wally returned to Montana with my mother briefly before the agency assigned him to work in Formosa in support of Chiang Kai-shek. My father traveled to Formosa prior to the end of '52 and my mother traveled to be with him a few months later.

Wally joined up on Formosa with other agency-recruited smokejumpers to train Nationalist Chinese agents how to jump and use radio equipment. The jumpers' cover story for being on Formosa was that they were employees of an import/export company called Western Enterprises International (WEI).

WEI was a cover for many CIA employees working on Formosa and employed a handful of



Taiwan Group early 50s L-R: Marian Dobbins, Wally Dobbins (MSO-47), Jack Wall (MSO-48), Lyle Grenager (MSO-48) and Herman Ball (MSO-50). (Courtesy Pete Dobbins)

former smokejumpers. WEI carried out a variety of covert activities and was also the logistics arm for the agency's operations on the island.

When Wally arrived on Formosa, he was put in charge of leasing residences/safe houses for agency personnel and supervised the agency's warehouse. The agency eventually leased about 200 homes and safe houses on Formosa. Most of the agency employees were allowed to bring their spouses and children to live with them, so my mother followed Wally to Formosa about six months after he had arrived on the island.

They both described how great the living conditions were; they had a cook, a driver, a gardener and a nice residence. My dad didn't speak much about his involvement in activities outside of Formosa but did mention overflights into China to drop Nationalist agents, in which I think he participated.

He did describe an interesting method of inserting and recovering agents from China (this occurred after the agency ceased their overflights

of the Chinese mainland).

The agency acquired junk fishing boats and modified the stern of the boats to accommodate Evinrude motors that could be dropped into the water through a panel just above the boat's waterline. During the day the junks would masquerade as fishing boats in the straits of Formosa, then at night drop their motors into the water and power to the shore of the mainland to drop off or recover Nationalist agents. In the morning, the junks would be once again fishing in the straits with the communist Chinese none the wiser about what was going on. I believe Wally participated in some of these trips.

My father's other agency duties kept him on Formosa most of the time. He consistently dealt with theft and graft among the Nationalist Chinese that sometimes interfered with agency operations. Much of that had to do with Nationalist soldiers stealing supplies and equipment that the U.S. brought to Formosa to sell or barter for on Formosa's black market.

My dad mentioned a time when Chiang Kai-shek rounded up islanders who were dealing items on the black market and transported them to a race track near Taipei, where they were executed. He said the islanders referred to this as “Black Thursday,” the day of the executions.

Wally had a Nationalist Chinese Army colonel assigned to him as an interpreter to help him with his duties around the island. He and the interpreter once attended a basketball game in Taipei where the Harlem Globetrotters played against the Nationalist Chinese basketball team. The Globetrotters displayed their usual gamesmanship during the first half of the game and embarrassed the Chinese team, which angered the Chinese crowd.

During halftime as the Globetrotters were leaving the court, a few spectators threw Coke bottles at the Globetrotters. An announcement was made in Chinese to the crowd shortly afterward. My father asked his interpreter what the announcer had said and the colonel replied that anyone caught throwing bottles would be taken to the “race track.”

While on Formosa my father also worked with personnel from Civil Air Transport (CAT). As you probably know, CAT provided aircraft and crews for many CIA operations. Wally remained friends with some of the CAT pilots over the years, including Bob Rousselot and Connie Siegrist.

I met both Rousselot and Siegrist and was impressed with how subtle they were about their agency careers. Siegrist later flew for Intermountain Aviation.

My father's assignment in Formosa concluded in 1954, and he and my mother traveled back to Montana. My father took coaching jobs in Thompson Falls and Arlee and completed a master's degree in education administration at the University of Montana in 1958. My dad served as a smokejumper for a final season in 1957.

Guam

Wally returned to work for the agency in 1960 and was sent to Guam. His covert work there included recruiting Guamanians to work for the CIA and processing agency personnel for assignments in Asia.

He had previously completed a degree in physi-

cal education from the University of Montana and this would become part of his cover while working on the island. He obtained a job coaching track and working in the library of the local middle school.

Guam served as a staging point for some of the agency's personnel who were headed to assignments in the Far East. The agency would hold employees on Guam long enough to establish a cover identity and to determine if they were being followed.

Wally generated new identities for these agency personnel and arranged their housing on Guam. My mother (and by now, their two sons) again accompanied my father overseas, and she worked for the commander of Guam Naval Base.

While living on Guam my dad spent the summer of 1961 based out of Takhli, Thailand, working with the Hmong in Laos. My mother and two brothers remained on Guam. It was during this time he mentioned staying at a camp in Laos to provide jump and explosives training to the Hmong.

He also worked out of Takhli, flying missions as a kicker in support of Hmong activities; some of the missions he flew included photographing the North Vietnamese movement into Laos. On one such mission, my dad said he was supposed to fly as the photographer but didn't because he was ill. He said the aircraft never returned and the crew was reported killed.

On the humorous side of things, Wally liked to tell the story of how some of the agency's smokejumpers were housed with Air Force personnel in a two-story barracks at Takhli. When the jumpers moved in, they were told they would have to reside upstairs (where it was hot at night and hard to sleep). The jumpers relocated a few baby cobras from the jungle to the lower level of the barracks, prompting the Air Force personnel to demand to move upstairs.

Intermountain Aviation

Wally's work for the agency in Guam ended in 1962, and he traveled back to the U.S. to interview for a position at a college in California. My mother and brothers remained in Guam while my dad looked for employment. It was during this time that he was asked if he would be interested in

relocating to Arizona to continue working for the CIA.

His work overseas had been as a contract employee and one of Wally's conditions for returning to work for the agency was they would have to hire him as a regular government employee, which they did. So, in the summer of '62, my dad and family moved to Marana Air Park – about 15 miles north of Tucson – where he started work for Intermountain Aviation. The agency had also looked at a location in Brownsville, Texas, to house Intermountain but chose Marana instead.

Marana Air Park, a World War II pilot training base had been mostly closed up since the conclusion of the war. My dad's initial duties at the base were to get the airpark's sewer, water, power and the hangers, runway, housing and restaurant operable. Our family and about six other families resided in Marana during this time. Intermountain eventually remodeled several barracks into apartments at the airpark and built approximately eight homes for Intermountain personnel to live in.

Once the airpark's infrastructure was usable, Wally's duties shifted to supporting Intermountain's training program and deploying on temporary assignments.

My dad didn't speak much about activities in which he participated off-base, but I believe he spent time in South America, and I know he made at least one trip to Alaska – although I don't know why.

He did mention working on preparations for a rescue mission of a CIA pilot who had been captured in Laos. The plan was to use Intermountain's B-17 and the Fulton Skyhook System to extract the pilot from a prison. Intermountain employees built a mockup of part of the prison at Marana and practiced a few extractions. The B-17 was then flown to the Philippines to stage for the rescue.

The intent was to bribe some of the pilot's captors to smuggle a Skyhook ground apparatus into the prison. The captured pilot would then set up the equipment and await a nighttime extraction from the B-17.

The mission was never carried out. I believe Wally said the pilot was moved from the prison shortly before the planned extraction, ending chances of a recovery.

Wally approached the Forest Service about establishing a training facility at Marana to help with Intermountain's cover story. I'm not sure what year it was when the Forest Service set up training at Marana, which eventually developed into the National Advanced Resource Training Center (NARTC). I know the CIA rotated smokejumpers who were employed by the agency through Marana, using NARTC as a cover.

As you probably know, Intermountain's activities centered on developing methods of cargo and personnel delivery in support of agency operations worldwide. They also provided pilot training and aircraft modification to foreign countries.

Some of the developments that came out of Marana included attempts to land and take off a Pilatus Porter on floats from straw, development of remote-controlled parachutes and remotely piloted aircraft, development of cargo drop systems and, of course, development of the Skyhook.

Intermountain also trained U.S. Military aviation units over the years. I remember a National Guard PBY air unit coming to Marana to train for low-level cargo drops. Wally said they would practice with Intermountain personnel at night in the desert surrounding Marana.

I recall when my older brothers and some of the other kids living at the airpark entered one of the PBYs parked on the ramp and got into some crates of guns and grenades stored on the aircraft. I'm not sure what happened next, but my brothers and other kids stayed away from the flight line after that.

Intermountain was involved with activities in South America, although I heard very little about those operations. I remember my dad mentioning the agency considered sending him to Africa, but the political environment there at the time was too volatile, so he never went. Intermountain had a supplemental-type certificate from the FAA to modify aircraft, and I remember hearing about how they modified their C-46s, DC-7, and their Pilatus Porter for low-level parachute delivery of personnel and cargo.

I also heard rumors over the years about Intermountain adding weapons systems to aircraft, but my father said "he never heard about that."

Wally continued to manage Marana Air Park's facilities, provide training, and go out on agency

assignments until he left the agency in 1970. One story he shared was how he participated in training Cuban helicopter pilots to drop personnel and cargo from helicopters on the Santa Fe National Forest in New Mexico.

Intermountain came up with a cover story that the Cubans were Mexican pilots from the Division of Forestry in Mexico and were in the United States to learn mountain flying from Forest Service personnel. During the training one of the Cubans hovered his helicopter over a prison near Santa Fe. Wally said a parade of law enforcement personnel quickly showed up at the airport wanting to talk to the pilot.

As a part of their cover, Wally donned a Forest Service uniform and provided a story that

the “Mexican” pilot had become disoriented and accidentally overflowed the prison. The authorities bought the story and my dad said that the Intermountain folks and the Cubans packed up the operation and returned to Marana the next morning.

Intermountain ceased operations in 1973. At the time the company was testing a remotely-piloted Cessna 337, and on a flight it flew beyond the control of ground personnel and crash-landed on a golf course in north Tucson.

Suspicion about the aircraft arose when firefighters and police who responded to the crash found no pilot. The publicity from this event and previous media stories that had emerged about Intermountain prompted the agency to pull the plug on the Marana operation. 🕒

The Ups And Downs Of Rescuing Neilford Eller

by James R. Brunk (Missoula '45)

This is the second in a series former CPS-103 smoke-jumper James Brunk has named “Five Smokejumpers’ Rescue Stories.” Brunk was a conscientious objector during World War II. Jim earned his M.D. from the University of Virginia in 1954 and specialized in internal medicine.

Neilford Eller’s (MSO-45) jump toward the top of a ridge near a fire – I don’t remember the name of the fire – did not go as he had planned. As he came down among the tall tamarack trees, his parachute did not hang up between those trees but partially collapsed. Thus he fell rapidly, landing on his back first on an 8- to 10-inch deadfall log lying across two 10- to 12-foot-high boulders. Falling 10-12 feet farther, he landed on a rock between the boulders. The big log may have saved his life, but he had broken his back.

Before my suit, helmet, harness, parachute, etc. had come from the Cooper’s Ridge Fire and the rescue of **Archie Keith** (MSO-45), my name had again appeared on the jump list. However, **Vic Carter** (MSO-43), our Forest Service super-

intendent, helped replace my equipment. Thus I jumped with the next rescue crew, landing not far from Neil – as had the rest of the rescue crew.

Jim Jackson (MSO-44), my squadleader, was our spotter. **Bill Wood** (MSO-43), one of our squadleaders, was picked to lead our rescue crew. Bill had brought an Allen stretcher, an aluminum frame with a wire basket-like lining – a really great improvement over the old wooden and canvas Forest Service stretcher.

We found Eller lying flat on the rocks between the boulders. Loading him carefully into the basket-like stretcher, we began to carry him out.

Al Malthaner (MSO-45), a young man from Brooklyn, N.Y., led us up along the top of the ridge where the woods were relatively open – and the going was easier.

After possibly a half-mile, Bill called me off to the side of the stretcher and said, “Get that Malthaner out of the lead – we have to get down off this ridge. The trail is down in the bottom, across the creek.” Since Al Malthaner was a 19-year-old city boy, not a farm boy or a woods-

man, he apparently had little sense of direction out of our area.

Making a sharp turn to the left, we worked our way down the side of the mountain. When we reached the bottom, we found the stream that Bill had known was there even though we hadn't been able to see or hear it from the top of the ridge. After we crossed the stream and climbed the bank up the next ridge, we found a trail, making our going much easier.

A mile or two farther, we met **Dr. Amos Little** (MSO-43), the famous "paradoctor," who had jumped and come to meet us to help Neil. Dr. Little lived up to his name – he was only about 5 feet and 3 or 4 inches tall. He reminded me of a Bantam rooster from a Virginia farm – but he carried a pack about as big as he was.

We continued to walk in 10-minute "tricks," six men carrying the stretcher and two resting as we walked. I offered to carry Dr. Little's large pack during one of my 10-minute resting "tricks," but he refused. A bit later, though, when he had

stopped and taken off his pack in order to help Neil, I stepped around behind him, sat down in front of the pack, and strapped it on.

When we got up to go, he turned to me and demanded, "Now gimme that pack."

I refused.

He responded, "Gimme that pack, or I'm gonna hit ya with this ax!" He had a pulaski in his hand.

I replied, "You go ahead and hit me, but I'm gonna carry this pack a while!"

As we neared possibly a quarter of a mile to the end of the trail and rounded a curve, we saw a group of Forest Service men sitting and smoking by the trail. As soon as they spotted us, they jumped up, grabbed the stretcher, and jogged about a hundred yards around another curve to the waiting ambulance.

Bill's face reddened with anger. "Those low-life ... !" he growled. "They're going to take full credit," he predicted, "for carrying Neil all the way – six to eight miles – out!" Which they did! 🗡️

Siskiyou Smokejumper Base Reunion

Feeling empty... Tired of just hanging around... Then mark your calendar: June 24-26, 2016. This may well be a gathering of the last of the Mohicans so it is well worth your effort to attend. The restoration of the base through the museum project is remarkable and you will be filled with nostalgia when you once again walk on the grounds. Jumping at the Gobi was one of the best jobs all of us ever had and certainly one that affords countless great memories.

We want this to be a reunion all will treasure. This can only be accomplished through your attendance. Though the base is a great place to visit, it is the crew (you) who made the Gobi the place it was. The crew consisted of tough-minded young men, looking back, maybe a little on the reckless side, but with an attitude that exuded pride through the "can do" philosophy that prevailed throughout the base's existence.

Registration packets will be sent after the first of the year. Packets will be emailed to those who have email and sent by snail mail to those who don't have email. Please let us know if your mailing address and/or email address have changed since the 2011 reunion.

Tommy Albert
P.O. Box 152
Vida, OR 97488
541-896-3237
twalbert44@yahoo.com

Reunion Reactions

Ron Stoops (MSO-57): “I have now returned from my Montana travels, which included attending the 75th Anniversary Reunion, and I wanted to write and express my thanks to the chairman, committee, and the many volunteers who combined to make this such a special occasion. I know and appreciate the amount of planning, organizing, and execution required to sponsor an event of this scope. I offer my personal kudos to each and everyone involved. Thank you and a tip of hat to the 75th Team. It was special.”

Jim Cherry (MSO-57): “So many people to try to connect with and so little time to do so. I always would like to have more time for that renewal of friendships and reliving memories since I live so far away from other jumpers and don’t have the opportunity for those weekly or monthly get-togethers. That’s one of the things that makes the trails program so valuable because it gives me a chance for some in-depth relationship building with old friends and for making new friends. At this reunion I was able to connect with a classmate from 50 years ago, share a plane ride home with a new acquaintance and end up with both becoming new NSA Life Members. My thanks and appreciation goes out to all who made our 75th Anniversary Reunion such a success.”

Phil Robertson (MSO-62): “It was a grand time with a good attendance, although many of the jumpers I knew well during my time at MSO were not there.

“**Mike Steppe** (IDC-61) and I, along with our wives, went in to Mann Gulch which was a tough walk for us due to the poor trail and heat but worth the effort. I think NSA should encourage the USFS to develop a decent access trail into the area from the boat landing. That area is historically significant and deserves official recognition.

“Sadly, the sound system for the talks on Saturday night was horrible. I heard little of what was said during those presentations. Part of the problem is my hearing but my wife, who has good hearing, understood little of what was said. That was the biggest negative of the entire event in my opinion.

“Another frustration was the nametags which

invariably were turned over so that you only saw the back of the tags and had to wonder or ask the person their name.

“All in all it was a great weekend with the highlight allowing us to connect with our past as Smokejumpers. The demo jump at the base was exhilarating to be so close to the drop zone.”

Jim Frakes (RDD-65): “Was going to send all the folks that put the reunion together a thank you card, but I’ll just have to do it this way.

“It’s with great appreciation for the folks that took their time and extensive efforts to do this for the rest of us jumpers. Hope every one enjoyed it as much as I did.”

Fred Ebel (MSO-57): “I really enjoyed the 75th reunion. It was a chance to visit with friends and colleagues that I don’t see but once in a blue moon. **Carl Gidlund’s** (MSO-58) reading of **Bob Sallee’s** (MSO-49) writings was an excellent presentation.”

Perry Rahn (MSO-61): “I had a great time, especially at the ’61 MSO group reunion at the Mountain Flying Museum Saturday morning.”

Murry Taylor (RDD-65): “I thought the reunion was great since it involved seeing so many important friends. The barbecue and breakfast were fine and much enjoyed. Although the breakfast was delicious and beautifully presented, the strong--in my opinion--over the top leanings to the Bible and a Christian view of God, etc. was in poor taste. Other people have different spiritual views and beliefs. I think this would have been better if 3 or 4 recently passed jumpers’ lives were honored. I’m thinking of Luke Sheehy and Del Catlin as examples. There could have been slides on a screen and various people speaking of their lives as jumpers.

“My big complaint is of the Saturday Banquet. The sound setup was pathetic; those in the back section couldn’t hear worth a damn. That was bad enough, but my biggest bitch is the choice of John Maclean as key speaker. For the life of me, I just can’t understand the logic of such a choice. Sure, it was Montana. And he is a Montana native and son of Norman, but still, he was never one of us

in any shape or form. We were there to celebrate 75 Years of Smokejumping, not listen to the droning, monotonous review of a fire that was news twenty-one years ago, nor even the Yarnell tragedy of 2013.

“Think of it, 75 Years of Smokejumping. This was our moment to celebrate, to stand up, to speak, to tell a jump story, to get tears in our eyes, and to remember the greatness of an experience that has enriched our lives immensely. To pass by this opportunity was a great blunder in shortsightedness.”

Lon Dale (MSO-69): “Everyone on the committee needs to be congratulated for doing a great job. Some of the speakers were too long, but lots of good aspects, like the silent auction, which resulted in some good deals for me. Most important is the time to meet old friends and their families.”

Don Larson (MSO-74): “Well first, the organization was first rate, so that team gets accolades and should be retained for any future reunions. It goes without saying connecting with other old jumpers, nice to see most of us getting old and fat together, was great fun. It was also great to hear of the successes most of the jumpers have had in their lives, a fine and rare fraternity.”

Guy Hurlbutt (IDC-62): “For me, the best part of this, and other reunions, is the opportunity to see and visit with great people who in some cases I have not seen in many years. It is a memorable group, and I truly enjoy spending time with them and swapping stories of life as it used to be.

“As for the reunion, I thought the quality and location of the auction were very good and better than we have seen in other years. We had some great donations of items, and I know they received a lot of interest. Among the events, Linda and I were very impressed with the Sunday morning memorial service. It was exceptionally well done, and the band added to the quality of the ceremony. So did the minister.

“I think a few more formal, well publicized, events would have been good. There was the usual open house at the Jump Base and a practice jump, but little for the families and those who don't play golf. A fun run/walk, raft trip on the Clark Fork in or near Missoula, bus or van tour to nearby points of interest, some designated lectures or recollections from a couple of old-timers in meeting

rooms at various times of day are things that come to mind.

“Have a designated area, marked by a sign or banner, for each jump base, giving a better opportunity for attendees to hook up with those they actually jumped with. Given the size of the crowd, I never did run into a few jumpers from Idaho City who I learned later were there.”

Jack Cahill (MSO-58): “Great opportunity to review some of the greatest years—good BBQ—great Saturday dinner—lots of same stories embellished a bit plus a few that I did not hear before—another get together would be great.”

Ed Courtney (MSO-58): “It was a good reunion, though I somehow missed seeing a number of old friends that were always on the other side of the crowd. My wife came up with a good suggestion: If possible try and seat groups of jumpers by the years (or decades) they trained. This would allow, for instance the 40's, or 50s, etc, jumpers to sit near each other and more easily visit. And, one could always get up and move over to another group. Probably could have signs placed around groups of tables that indicate year trained.”

Barry Reed (MSO-60): “I thought that it was a great reunion. I saw a couple of people that I rookied with in 1960 that I had not seen since that year plus a few that I worked with Air America in S. E. Asia. Keep up the good work.”

Bernie Weisgerber (RDD-60): “Overall, my wife and I thought it was a very well organized and put together gathering. We really appreciate all the time and effort that went into this event by the group. The group that organized the silent auction that was so successful needed a larger display room.

“The base having a practice jump with the new chute was very good, too. It gave many a chance to see this system first hand.

“The choice of the guest speaker was not good in my opinion. The PA system was terrible for starters. No doubt he is a very knowledgeable individual on this topic. However, it was the wrong audience, time, and place for this lengthy, drawn-out and non-relevant presentation. I believe a guest speaker should have a short presentation that is of interest to the audience.

“We will definitely attend future reunions as it a great time to see new country, visit with old

friends and make new acquaintances.”

Jim Snapp (MSO-65): “Great Reunion. What could be improved on? Friday night: bonfire away from the beer truck would have set the stage. Saturday: getting the times out for the live jumps. We got there when the plane landed.”

John “Doc” Lammers MSO-71: “Thanks to Jim Phillips and his committee of volunteers who worked long and hard to make the reunion a success. It was great to visit with old friends.”

Monroe “Spud” Dejarnette (MSO-49): “I brought Betty along even though she was skeptical, having to tag along behind me. To her surprise and delight, there were a number of wives attending that she met over the years. She enjoyed meeting them once more and engaging with them in their own reminisces. Betty enjoyed the commemoration as much as I did.

“Speeches: Carl was to the point and finished. Bravo! McLean was much too long. He could have made his point in half the time, diagrams and all. What could have been an engaging observation regarding fire management became tedious, then boring.

“The venue was excellent, the food was good, and the prices were fair, the companionship was first rate!”

Lee Gossett (RDD-57): “Mary and I had a great time and reconnected with old jumper friends and wives of many years ago. Great venue at the University and the silent auction was a big hit which brought in new dollars to the National Smokejumper Association. Hats off to the organizers of the reunion, great job. Might toss out a suggestion that we make the reunions every three years instead of five years as our core group is getting older and the younger jumpers don’t seem to share our ‘brotherhood bond’ as much as we would like to see.”

Rich Grandalski (RDD-64): “I enjoyed the reunion and would like to thank all those that worked so hard to organize the event. No easy task with what I heard was 800 or more smokejumpers and guests attending. It was great meeting old friends and making new ones during the various programs and events that were set up. The reunion location was excellent for providing a great outdoor barbeque, indoor programs like the Triple Nickle, silent auction and options to purchase

books, T-shirts, or to strike up a conversation with an old jumper. The main dinner was excellent, and the caterer and employees did an outstanding job shuffling between so many tables and people to serve everyone.

“I would suggest that the sound systems for speakers and bands (like an open-area BBQ), as well as the main dinner, is such that it will provide adequate range for such a large audience. It was especially difficult to hear the speakers at the main dinner for so many towards the back of the room. I also would like to suggest that speaker time limits should be set up in order to keep such a large audience captivated.”

Mike McCracken (CJ-60): “The reunion was the best I’ve ever attended. In fact, I dropped Jim Phillips a note shortly after returning home complimenting him on a terrific job of organization. The setting was perfect for such a large group, the housing options were excellent, and the catering job done by the U of Montana staff was consistently good. The only complaint I heard from a few guys was that a few beers should have been included at the reception the first night. It would make sense to increase the cost of the reunion “tuition” to cover those beers, rather than to arrive and start reaching for one’s wallet.”

Gary “Gramps” Johnson (RDD-69): “I feel that this reunion was one of better ones I have attended. The reunion committee did an outstanding job in putting this together. And they should be commended.”

Karl Hartzell (BOI-70): “I probably can’t add much to surely a preponderance of positive comments regarding our recent reunion in Missoula. It was my first such get-together, and there’s no question I enjoyed myself thoroughly, principally with reconnecting with several former Boise and McCall jumpers I hadn’t seen in 40 some years. What an unexpected treat it was to converse with them and many other jumpers from other bases who fought fire years before I did and invoked people and places that hold a firm footing in smokejumper lore and history.

“Of the several presentations and events I attended, I give my highest rating to Bob Bartlett’s eye-opening history of the Triple Nickles. I remained at rapt attention through every detail he related of this special group’s mission as they dealt

with the segregation imposed constraints of the time (and as it turned out, apparently a minimum of training and lack of body protecting and safety ensuring equipment). Bob so energized me with his story of the 555th that I hope to do some research on my own. If I come up with some additional nuggets on these brave souls who so desperately desired to serve their country, I'll compose an article for the magazine.

"I could rattle on with accolades and note a

few missed beats (that most mediocre and minimum-portioned, overpriced, Sat. dinner comes to mind)."

Bill Ruskin (CJ-58): "We had a great time at the reunion in Missoula! My wife, Brigitte, and I stayed with Roy and Suzanne Williams, and it was a non-stop weekend for us. The event was well organized, very successful, and we enjoyed seeing old friends and making new ones. Congrats to all the organizers who made the event so special." 🍄

NSA Scholarships For 2015 Announced

The NSA Scholarship Committee of **Gary Baker** (MSO-67), **Larry Lufkin** (CJ-63), and "**Doc**" **Smith** (MSO-59) have announced the winners of the 2015 NSA Scholarships.

The NSA annually awards four \$1,000 Jukala/McBride scholarships, one \$1,000 **Robert Potter** (MSO-51) scholarship, one \$500 **Jim Cherry** (MSO-57) scholarship, and one \$250

Donald Maypole (IDC-54) scholarship. This years recipients are:

Chris Wennogle (FBX-07). Chris is a repeat winner having been selected for one of the 2013 scholarships. As in 2013, Chris is enrolled in graduate studies at Colorado State University pursuing his Master's Degree.

Nate Hesse (RDD-01) is the current parachute loft foreman at Redding. After his initial years at



Rebecca Cherry (Courtesy R. Cherry)



Erin Springer (Courtesy E. Springer)

Redding, he transferred to Grangeville into a spotter position. After seven years at Grangeville, Nate came back to Redding to his current position. Nate is pursuing his Bachelors Degree at Eastern Oregon University in LaGrande.

Jessica Lusk is the daughter of **Scott Lusk** (FBX-81) and **Cindy Lusk** (RAC-86). Jessica is pursuing her degree in nursing at Lewis/Clark State College in Lewiston, Idaho. She has completed three years at Feather River College and two years of nursing school at North Idaho College. She is on track to graduate in May 2016.

Jamie Foland is the wife of Alaska Smokejumper **Randy Foland** (FBX-01). She completed her Bachelor's Degree from the University of Alaska in 2005 and is pursuing an 18-month program with the Center of Guided Montessori Studies to become a certified Primary Montessori instructor. This certification will prepare her to become a lead teacher in a Montessori Children's House

classroom with children ages 2.5 to 6 years old.

Erin Springer (RAC-08) is a repeat winner having received one of the 2014 NSA scholarships. She is pursuing her Master's Degree in Forestry at the University of Montana where she maintains a 3.87 GPA. She is currently jumping at Missoula.

Gavin Kearns is the son of **Mitch Kearns** (GAC-89), the current training foreman at Missoula. Gavin is currently a sophomore at Montana State University and pursuing a degree in chemical engineering.

Rebecca Cherry is the granddaughter of **Jim Cherry** (MSO-57) and is in her third year at Wartburg College in Iowa. Becca is majoring in accounting with a minor in math, and also competes on the women's Track & Field Team. She currently has a 3.8 GPA in her major field and plans on pursuing a career in accounting when she graduates. 🦋

Redding Smokejumper Loft To Be Dedicated To Bob Kersh

Mark Thursday, January 14, 2016, 1100 hours on your calendar. On that day the California Smokejumper Parachute Loft will be dedicated to Robert C. "Bob" Kersh.

In a process that started in November 2014, **Scott Warner** (RDD-69) worked through the system until the process was completed on September 23, 2015.

From the original Petition and USFS Briefing Paper: "Robert C. "Bob" Kersh made extraordinary contributions to the U.S. Forest Service and Pacific Southwest Region Smokejumpers above and beyond what would normally be expected of the job. He helped build the California Smokejumpers from before there was even a Base, and his parachute, equipment, and training innovations extended outside of the Forest Service, to the BLM, U.S. Military, and throughout the world."

Hope to see you there on January 14, 2016. 🦋

Help in Buying *More or Less Crazy*

by **Murry Taylor** (Redding '65)

I've set up a deal with my publisher so people can buy my new book, "More or Less Crazy," and support their favorite jump base welfare fund at the same time. When someone buys a book in this manner, the designated base fund gets \$2.

Here's how it works:

1. In computer search window go to:
bookstobelievein.com/MoreorLessCrazy.php
2. Scroll down and look on the right for a window listing all the jump bases, the Wildland Firefighter Foundation, and a few other places to support.
3. Wait for your favorite base to appear, click on it, and you can follow prompts from there.

This is also set up for the Siskiyou Smokejumper Base Museum. 🦋

NEW BOOK INTRODUCTION

**“WILDFIRE WEST - WILDLAND FIREFIGHTING PICTORIAL
VOLUME ONE” - MIKE MCMILLAN**

Release Date: August, 2015. First Printing - June, 2015.

available at www.wildfirewest.com

Spotfire Images Press - Boise, Idaho - spotfireimages@yahoo.com - (800) 707-8604



Author: Mike McMillan

Since 1988, firefighter and photographer Mike McMillan has documented his career as a smokejumper, hotshot and emergency firefighter with a camera by his side. Covering 300-plus wildfires, Mike documents how air and ground transport is just the start to long shifts - building fireline with saws, pulaskis, and bulldozers, often fighting fire with fire. Planes and helicopters assist the efforts of crews on the firelines in Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, Oregon, Utah and Washington.

Pages: 238

Photos: 467

Cost: \$44.95

ISBN: 978-0-692-39105-1



“Wildfire West - Wildland Firefighting Pictorial, Volume One” is a book made from the inside-out, from the vantage of those answering this unique call to duty. It’s a visual record of success and loss during McMillan’s 27 fire seasons, showing readers an unprecedented and unobstructed view of a culture of civil servants defending the American homeland. Photographed with SLR cameras, color-slide film and digital formats, full-page photos show readers what it looks like to work in the ranks of the hotshot and smokejumper crews, the engine crews, with a cast of heavy equipment and aircraft in the fight. The personal and environmental portraits the author shares with readers are compelling and inspiring.

www.wildfirewest.com (800) 707-8604

Plane On Fire!

by Major L. Boddicker (Missoula '63)

A recent article about the “Caterpillar Award” kicked my memory into gear about scary incidents in or around aircraft during my four years of jumping.

The first occurred in August 1968. The Redmond base had a fire bust and requested a Missoula backup crew to assist them, during Aug. 4-11. We were flying west of the Redmond base in a DC-3 on a bright, beautiful morning over extensive unbroken forest and mountains of western Oregon.

Suddenly, a buzzer blared; a cloud of gray smoke poured off the left engine. I think there were eight jumpers in the plane. We immediately assessed the situation and began hooking into the static line cable, ready to bail out. Thank God we did not have an open flame to jump through.

The spotter, whose name I don't remember, yelled at us to hold up. An oil line had broken and was pumping oil onto the manifold. He yelled that the plane had some working time before it would be in trouble.

My thought was *B.S.!* Smoke means fire and fire could mean an explosion; let's go now. But, we waited.

The spotter came back into the fuselage and said

the area below was a bad one in which to jump. They would fly the plane to a safer jump area, then jump us and try to cripple the DC-3 back to Redmond. It always amazed me at how much the pilots and spotters would risk to cripple the old jump birds home. It was awesome how cool the pilots were in emergencies.

After a few minutes of flight, we passed over a large clear-cut area and we bailed out. Huge relief! We had a very nice jump and landing in several hundred acres of clear-cut.

The DC-3 turned, still smoking, and headed back to Redmond. I think the pilot feathered the ailing engine shortly after we bailed out.

Trucks from the local district picked us up and hauled us back to Redmond.

I do not remember who else was on the disabled DC-3, but **Greg Anderson** (MSO-68), **Alan Stohle** (MSO-68), **Menno Troyer** (MSO-



The Twin Beechcraft hauled two to four jumpers from nearly every base. The aircraft averaged 25 to 30 years old in 1963 and flew hundreds of thousands of miles. (Courtesy M. Boddicker)



The DC-2s and DC-3s hauled two to 16 jumpers on fires. These reliable old birds were also 25-30 years old in 1963. (Courtesy M. Boddicker)

68) and I jumped fires together from that bust period out of Cave Junction and Redmond.

Does anyone remember the incident and can verify and add to my recollections?

The next incident was on the R-5 California pounder fire, Aug. 25, 1968, north of Monrovia, Calif. The MSO crew spent a day cutting line down into one of those jungles of oak brush and manzanita. It was a scary fire – hot, dry, snakes, poison ivy and poison oak, steep and windy.

At the end of our shift, we met up with a hotshot crew that was working the ravine up from the bottom. They had whacked a helispot out of the brush, which to my eye was about 20 percent too small.

The hotshot crew crowded around the edges of the helispot to insure they got on the chopper first. Our MSO crew waited back up the fireline out of the helicopter's reach.

On the first trip in, the chopper dropped, adjusted, and then had to readjust to avoid the hotshot crew. It dropped its tail rotor into the manzanita, and all hell broke loose. The chopper started to spin and drop; it was out of control. It looked like ground pounder, chopped oak brush and manzanita salad for sure.

The chopper pilot immediately cut the engine

and dropped 6-8 feet to the ground. There was no fire, and the main rotor was not damaged. No hotshot crew member was injured, miraculously.

Needless to say, the chopper pilot was exceedingly unhappy and screamed expletives at the hotshots.

All of us then had to hike back up our fireline in

a cloud of dust to the road to catch a ride back to base camp.

The third incident came after the Tolson Mountain Fire out of Fairbanks in late June 1969. Two of us were assigned to load choppers at the Bureau of Land Management warehouse; I do not remember who the other jumper was. The fire season was going full-steam so choppers were arriving, unloading, reloading and leaving frequently. Unless a chopper had to refuel, I think the pilot did not shut down the engine.

The chopper started to spin and drop; it was out of control. It looked like ground pounder, chopped oak brush and manzanita salad for sure.

Shortly after a lunch break, a chopper came in normally. We unloaded it, and then reloaded it with rations, pumps and the usual fire gear. We crouched and ran out from under the chopper as quickly as we could, turned and waved to the pilot that we were clear so he could take off.

He lifted the chopper about 40 feet and the engine quit, cold dead! The chopper dropped like a rock, bounced slightly then tipped on its side, dipping the main rotor into the tarmac.

We were maybe 25 yards from the wrecked chopper, expecting it to explode. We hesitated several minutes but, as it did not blow up, we ran over to the chopper and

helped the pilot out of the wreck. Emergency crews arrived shortly thereafter to take over the incident. The pilot was not injured.

I remember we stayed around to help the emergency folks and start the cleanup. There wasn't much we could do but thank the great Smokejumper Guardian Angel that the chopper did not fall on us or blow up and skin-bubble us all.

The fourth incident was on a dry run to the Chandalar Lakes area north of Fairbanks about July 7, 1969. There were 16 of us flying in the DC-3. About one hour north of Fairbanks, the distinct smell of burning plastic appeared – very slight, but very obvious. We assumed it was airplane electric insulation burning. Of course, we were not comfortable with that.

The spotter and pilot were informed of the smoke and smell. The spotter came back, trying to sniff out the source of the smoldering plastic. The plane was stuffed with men and equipment, so it was difficult to move around in it.

After about 20 minutes of concerned, apprehensive searching, the source of the smoke was found. One of the jumpers smoked and had dozed off, dropping his lit cigarette. The cigarette butt



Chopper pilots, often vets from Korea or Vietnam wereare incredibly skilled at dealing with weather and fire extremes. The pilots' cool heads and quick hands saved the day for Boddicker on several occasions. (Courtesy M. Boddicker)

had fallen into a crack filled with wet cellophane and candy bar wrappers, which then smoldered, putting out the noxious smoke.

We doused it with a canteen of water and gave a community sigh of relief. The spotter chewed our butts out for being so careless, and on we flew.

The fire to which we were flying turned out to be a spruce-pollen cloud reported by an airplane pilot dry run. So back to Fairbanks we flew. We jumped the King Creek Fire shortly thereafter.

I always appreciated the aircraft from which we jumped and that which supported us from 1963 to 1969. The aircraft seemed to be the perfect fit for fighting fires, even if they were old, decrepit and full of individual foibles. Considering the importance of our smokejumper missions, I always wondered why we did not have the latest, most modern planes and facilities. What we had certainly got us quickly on fires and home for the next one.

The special engine sounds from the DC-3, Twin Beech, TBMs, and B-25s still give me goose bumps when I hear them flying over at airshows or the infrequent missions they now conduct. What a pleasure it was to fly in them or watch them drop retardant, often saving our bacon. 🙏

THE JUMP SUIT

The smokejumper and both the main and reserve parachutes are held together by the harness.

A neck guard is included in the jump suit design to protect the smokejumper in situations where unexpected changes in wind direction might blow him backward into sharp branches or outcrops of rock.

The static line is attached with a metal clip (seen temporarily clipped to the reserve parachute) to a cable inside of the airplane. When the smokejumper leaves the plane, the static line pulls the main parachute out of its pack and helps open it.

Personal items such as tooth brush, change of clothing and food are carried in the ditty bag under the reserve parachute.

The items displayed on the ground in front of the smokejumper are carried in the leg pockets.

The let-down rope is used to get to the ground if the parachute gets tangled in the branches of a tree.

A hand saw may be used for cutting tree branches that have tangled the smokejumper or parachute.

Once the firefighter is on the ground, parachutes are stuffed into a parachute bag to protect them from being damaged by embers from the fire.

Signal flags are rolled out on the ground to let the pilot know that the smokejumper landed safely (used if the radio isn't working).

This suit is representative of those used during the mid-1970s. Though some technology has changed, the equipment remains very similar today.



Courtesy: Stan Collins (MYC-67)

Bring NSA Traveling Smokejumper Museum To Your Community
Contact Chuck Sheley For Details