

The Jumpers and Their Stories

Malvin L. Brown, August 6, 1945

Malvin trained as a paratrooper in Georgia and as a smokejumper in Chico, California in 1945.

Following is from the Triplenickle Web Page, www.triplenickle.com and additional research by Mark Corbet (LaGrande '74):

Private First Class Malvin Brown of Narbroth, Pennsylvania, now part of Philadelphia, was a paratrooper medic with the U.S. Army's 555th Parachute Infantry Battalion (Triple Nickles). That was the world's only African-American airborne unit. In 1945, in response to a request by the U.S. Forest Service, the Army dispatched the 555th to the Western U.S. to combat fires set by Japanese firebombs and lightning.

They had two bases of operation, Chico, California and Pendleton, Oregon. With other troopers, Brown was sent to a fire on the Siskiyou National Forest. However, their plane landed at Medford, Oregon, and then was dispatched to several fires on the Umpqua National Forest. Brown jumped the Lemon Butte Fire northeast of Roseburg, Oregon. He landed in a tall tree and, while attempting to climb out of his harness and lower himself with a rope, he slipped or lost his grip and fell into a rock bed 150 feet below. It took three days for patrols to find his body. He was the first smokejumper killed in the line of duty.

Lester Lycklama, July 4, 1946

Lester trained in McCall in 1946.

From the recollections of John Ferguson (McCall '43) and Wayne R. Webb (McCall '46): On July 3, 1946, Payette National Forest fire dispatcher Harold (Slim) Vassar received a lookout's report of a small lightning fire on Fall Creek Ridge, near the Middle Fork of the Weiser River. Vassar discussed initial attack procedure with Fire Control Officer Glenn Thompson and they agreed the fire was in a remote area. With Stewart (Lloyd) Johnson and John P. Ferguson, they decided the fire was a smokejumper assignment.

Among the jumpers on call that day were Lester Lycklama, John L. Hennessey and Coston T. Aguirre. They were dispatched to the fire, along with spotter Lloyd Johnson, pilot Bob Fogg, and John Ferguson, who assisted on the fire run.

The fire was clearly visible from the air. Following a pass around the area, a landing spot close to the fire was selected and a drift chute dropped to check wind direction and velocity. Johnson, who spotted the jumpers, watched them bail out and land in the spot without incident. Ferguson helped Johnson drop the cargo, and as the plane left the fire area, he saw two jumpers headed for the fire and the remaining jumper picking up the jump gear. The operation was routine in every respect.

Meanwhile, on the fire, Lycklama and Hennessey were using a crosscut saw to fell a ponderosa pine that had been struck by lightning and was burning about two-thirds of the way up the tree. Aguirre was posted up the slope to serve as lookout for possible falling tree limbs. While they were sawing, the tree burned in two and the top third fell, almost in an upright position. Aguirre shouted a warning and the sawyers started running in their preselected escape routes. Lycklama tripped on a root, fell face down and was struck on the head by a tree limb, knocking him unconscious with a severe head injury.

The incident occurred at approximately 9:30 p.m. Hennessey and Aguirre stayed with the victim until daylight, when Hennessey went for help. He traveled about eight miles cross-country to a road on the Middle Fork of the Weiser River. He had started down river when a passing motorist stopped at his urgent plea and drove him to Council. He found a phone and called the forest dispatcher in McCall.

A rescue squad jumped in and carried the injured jumper on a stretcher about four miles cross-country to a trail. They had started down to the road when they met the ground party headed by Doctor Thurston. Johnson, Ferguson, and Aguirre continued on with the group to the hospital, while Webb, Case and Froman returned to the fire to finish putting it out and to gather the gear to await the packer who came in the next day.

Lester Lycklama died at 5:30 a.m., July 5, 1946, on the operating table at Council Hospital, having never regained consciousness.

Robert Bennett, August 5, 1949

Bob trained at Missoula in 1949. He died with 11 other Missoula smokejumpers in the Mann Gulch Fire.

The word portraits of Bennett below are from "Some of the Men of Mann Gulch" by Starr Jenkins (Cave Junction '48), 1993.

From Joyce B. Russell and Gary P. Bennett: He was born March 18, 1927, and from all reports was a delight to the family. He was my older brother, the third of four children born to Robert Guy and Annie Moses Bennett of Paris, Tennessee. His older siblings were Jeanne Moses Bennett (now Sharber) and Maurice Guy Bennett, now deceased. Dr. Augustus Oliver, family physician, friend and neighbor, ushered Robert into the world and saw him through the usual childhood illnesses and one life-threatening bout with diphtheria when he was four.

Bob was a good brother, son and human being, one of those rare people who truly cared about others and exhibited excellent character traits throughout life. He attended Sunday school and worship services, joining the First Christian Church in Paris. He completed elementary school in the same town, and we chased lightning bugs, wove clover chains, played Hide and Seek, Red Rover, tag, and other childhood games. When I climbed the gnarly apple tree in our backyard and panic struck, it was Bob's steady hand, which guided me safely to the ground again.

Bob did most of the things boys did then. He had a paper route, built and flew kites, made model airplanes, and experimented with chemistry and wood burning sets. Lest anyone polish a premature halo for him, however, he also started a grass fire near the garage, experimenting with matches and frightening our mother to near hysterics. His mind was curious but never vicious. He dropped a tiny piece of tobacco into my sister's eye once to see what would happen and was shocked when she reacted so quickly and so loudly. Another time, he called to me (in that same backyard), "Stop or I'll shoot!" I blithely kept running, never believing for a minute that my older brother, my guide and protector, would actually do such a thing with his new BB gun. But temptation overcame him. When the BB struck my back, not even penetrating my clothing, I howled mightily, sure that I was mortally wounded. He was properly contrite because this aberration had been a rare exception to his kind and generous nature.

Bob's interest in the outdoors was always there. He played football in high school as a center and worked hard and consistently. It was about this time that a classmate of his who had a crush on him made friends with me in order to visit our home. She was a sweet honest girl who told me of her infatuation and we remained friends. She visited our home after Bob died and grieved with us.

Bob was reserved and had a quiet strength of character. He was an honorable person with a good sense of humor. He was not preachy or better than thou, but was a fine young man.

Just after graduating from high school, Bob joined the Army, on May 31, 1945. He was a member of the 29th General Medical Corps stationed with the occupation forces in Japan. While serving also in Korea, he attained the rank of staff sergeant. He was honorably discharged from the Army on Christmas day, 1946.

After his service, using the GI Bill he enrolled in the University of Montana at Missoula because of its reputation for having a fine forestry program. The study of forestry had been his goal since childhood. His letters from Montana told us of his life there, his introduction to the ski slopes and friends he had met. One was Leonard Piper, who died with him at Mann Gulch. Bob was looking forward to his junior year at the U. and knew his smokejumper's pay would help.

This, of course, was not to be. Mann Gulch, August 5, 1949, happened instead. Bob will always be an excellent man in my memory and an important part of my past to be cherished.

From Barbara Bigham Simons: Robert Bennett was my schoolmate for as far back as I can remember. Because our last names both began with B, we always sat close together in class. I can't say that he dunked my pigtails in the inkwell because I neither had pigtails nor was he inclined to do such things.

He was intelligent, studious, quiet and unassuming, very courteous, pleasant and well liked by everyone. By the time we were in high school we were calling him Bob rather than Robert. I always felt that he would do well in anything that he undertook. However, I never imagined that Bob would aspire to such a dangerous career as being a firefighter in the Forestry Service. He gave his life courageously while serving his country. I'm proud to have counted him a good friend.

From Ms. Bobbie Parker: We lived across the street from the Bennett family from about 1943 on. Joyce and I became fast friends and are to this day. I remember Robert as a quiet, shy boy with a sweet smile, well liked by all who knew him.

I will never forget hearing on the radio of the danger of the forest fire in Montana and seeing Mrs. Bennett's worry. Then I remember the flag-draped casket being carried up the porch steps to the front hall of the Bennett home. We knew we had all lost a good man and a good friend then.

Mrs. Lucille Long: Bob Bennett, my brother-in-law, was a kind, thoughtful young man. When Pearl Harbor was bombed, my planned marriage to Bob's brother Maurice (who was in the Navy) was delayed three years because of the war. Robert and all the Bennetts were very kind to me. I visited their home often as I was very lonely. I worked at the Paris 5 & 10 Cents Store. Robert would come to Fry's Drug Store and have a Coke with me at the soda fountain while I ate my lunch. He was a polite, good-looking boy with a kind smile, and he was dearly loved by all his family and me.

I can remember his mother, who was in ill health at the time, hearing on the radio about the forest fire, and being so worried about Robert. Then later the Western

Union boy knocked at the door. We all knew then. His father called the family doctor before they read the message to her. The whole town of Paris, Tennessee was saddened by her loss.

From the X-Cel Project, Helena High School, August 1999: After the fire Robert Bennett's funeral services were to be held at the First Christian Church [in Paris, Tennessee]. The pallbearers were Johnny Miller, Farmer Barnett, Bob Thompson, Johnny Wiggs, Roy Reynolds and C.O. Futrells, Jr.

Bob Sallee, a Mann Gulch Fire survivor, wrote the following letter to Bob Bennett's mother, Mrs. Annie Bennett: I'm glad you have written to me, as I have been wanting to tell you about Bob. The smokejumpers are some of the best fellows in the world and your son was one of the best-liked men in camp. Several of the fellows came to me after I came back from that fire and asked if Bob had been along. I shall never forget the look of shock and pain on their faces when I told them that he had.

Of the men who died at Mann Gulch, Bob was the only one who showed any sign of using his head and thinking out a way or method, which might have meant survival for him. He took refuge in an open spot where there was nothing but grass. There he lay face down and gambled that the flames would go through the grass so fast that he would not burn. But God had decided it was Bob's time to come. He died without suffering because there is no pain from a hemorrhage of the lungs.

Your son is a hero. All men who die protecting something they love are heroes. Bob loved the forests very much. He died in a war that is as great as any other war ever fought on this earth. The war man fights against the eternal enemy of the forest -- fire. Your pastor is right. Bob lives. He lives in the hearts of every man, woman and child that loves the forests

Eldon E. Diettert, August 5, 1949

Eldon was from Missoula and he trained there in 1949. He died with 11 other Missoula jumpers in the Mann Gulch Fire. An honor roll forestry student at the University of Montana, he'd been called away from his 19th birthday luncheon to go to the fire.

The following is from "Some of the Men of Mann Gulch," Jenkins, 1993:

This account of Eldon's life was written by his brother, Gerald A. Diettert, M.D.: Eldon was born August 5, 1930, in Moscow, Idaho, the second son of Rueben and

Charlotte Diettert. Father was an assistant professor in Botany at the University of Idaho, mother a housewife. Eldon was the only one in the family who had naturally curly hair and mother allowed it to grow without cutting until it was shoulder length (about like Shirley Temple's). Frequently the mailman would tease Eldon about this, calling him a "little girl." One day when Eldon was about three, following such taunting, he kicked the man in the shins and proclaimed, "I'm not a little girl."

When he was four, I took him to the Saturday morning movie series, "Buster Brown and his Dog" several times. Eldon always cried because he was afraid of "the dog" and had to be returned home, much to my disgust.

When Eldon was five, the family moved to Iowa City, Iowa, where his father returned to school to obtain his Ph.D. in Botany. During this time, the family lived in several apartments. While father was in school, mother did custodial work at the School of Dentistry. Father did his doctoral thesis on sagebrush and engaged his two sons in sanding and polishing sections of sagebrush for his project.

The family spent their summers on Grandfather Diettert's farm near North Judson, Indiana, where grandmother tried to fatten the brothers on cream and whole milk and gave them chickens to raise, then served them the birds at dinner before their departure for home at summer's end. Some time was also spent on Grandfather Thompson's farm near Lafayette, Indiana.

Two years later, in 1937, the family moved to Missoula, Montana, where father became a member and subsequently chairman of the Botany Department at the University of Montana. Soon after this move, both brothers obtained magazine routes, selling such periodicals as Liberty, True Confessions and True Detective. Eldon continued his route (actually an area of town considered to be his "property" to solicit for customers) throughout grade school and was very conscientious and punctual with his customers. Some of the money earned went to supplement the family income, but part was saved "for college."

At Paxson Elementary School, Eldon was an excellent student and received high marks. He was well liked by his teachers and fellow students. In contrast to his brother who was three years older and very protective of him, he never got into any fights. He was a member of Cub Scout Pack 1, Den 2 but did not continue in the Boy Scout program. He participated in a music program at the university, learning to play the clarinet. During summers, the family picked huckleberries to supplement their income.

Another adventure in the woods occurred when he was about nine: he and his brother climbed about 2,000 feet to a saddle in Mount Sentinel just east of the campus and cut down a Christmas tree that measured about 4 inches through at the

butt. The top fifteen feet was carried home where father shortened it again so it would fit into the house.

Eldon liked to build model airplanes powered by rubber bands, and after they had crashed and been repaired repeatedly, they were set on fire and launched from the second story bedroom window to “go down in flames.” Luckily the house did not burn down from these aerial funeral pyres.

In 1939, Eldon’s sister, Doris Jean, was born. Over the next ten years, Eldon became her chief protector, looking after her every need and taking her to movies and other local events.

During the summers at age nine and ten, Eldon helped me mow and water neighborhood lawns. Sometimes the grass was so tall Eldon pulled on a rope tied to the mower while I pushed. Eldon took over the lawn jobs on his own when eleven and twelve. Following this, he worked intermittently after school and summers at the K&W Grocery Store, delivering groceries and stocking shelves. He was studious in high school and, though he was tall, 6’3” and very strong, he did not participate in sports.

Our family took vacation trips to Glacier National Park and other camping spots. With his father’s encouragement, Eldon became an avid dry fly trout fisherman in his teens.

In the summers of 1947 and 1948 he worked for the U.S. Forest Service in the Blister Rust Control program at Camp Nowhere in northern Idaho. By the fall of 1948 he had decided that forestry would be his calling and he enrolled at the University of Montana where he continued to be a scholar and was on the high honor roll each quarter. Father bragged that Eldon was one of the best forestry students he had ever taught, but father was felt to be a bit prejudiced.

Eldon was very excited about and challenged by the smokejumper program and viewed it as a great opportunity in his chosen career. He was called away from his nineteenth birthday luncheon to go to the Mann Gulch fire.

In the fall of 1949, Wag Dodge took me, Eldon’s brother, up to Mann Gulch to view the fire scene and the site of Eldon’s death. I realize now what an emotional strain that must have been on Wag.

In Young Men and Fire, Maclean referred to a family that never spoke about their loss after the fire. I believe that was our family. In deference to my mother’s grief, the fire was never discussed and one treaded lightly in even recalling episodes in his life, a real shame, and unfair to him and his goodness, and unfair to all of us in remembering and talking about his short time with us with happiness.

Eldon Diettert did not live long enough to do any noteworthy accomplishments. His story is really that of an above-average American boy growing up in the Depression years, with his great promise unfulfilled. One sad mistake took away his life.

Phillip McVey, August 5, 1949

Phil, from Ronan, Montana, trained in Missoula in 1948. He died with 11 other Missoula jumpers in the Mann Gulch Fire.

From the X-Cel Project, Helena High School, August 1999: Philip R. McVey lived in Babb, Montana at the time of his death. During his childhood, he family lived in multiple places along the Canadian border because his father was employed by the U.S. Immigration Service. Phil went to Browning High School. He joined the Navy before he graduated, so he was an absentee graduate. Phil served five seasons with the Forest Service, and it was his second season smokejumping. Philip McVey was only 22 when he perished at the Mann Gulch Fire.

From his obituary in the Flathead Courier, Polson Montana, August 11, 1949: Phillip Rolla McVey, 22, . . . was buried in the Mountain View Cemetary Wednesday, August 10, at 10 a.m. The funeral was at the Shrider chapel in Ronan.

McVey was born in Choteau, Mont., April 1, 1927, and later moved to Babb. He attended grade school in North Port, Wash., high school in Browning, Mont., and had spent one year at the Montana State University in Missoula. He was a World War II veteran and a member of the Veterans of Foreign Wars. Military services were conducted by the American Legion and the VFW. Officiating pastor was Wessley Fine.

Survivors are his parents, Mrs. And Mrs. C.L. McVey, Babb; a brother, Robert McVey, St. Ignatius; grandparents, Mr. and Mrs. J.A. Hazel, Mission, and Mr. and Mrs. C.W. McVey, Washington; one aunt and three uncles.

From Life Magazine, August 22, 1949: McVey had been a naval aviator during World War II.

From Geraldine McVey of St. Ignatius, widow of Phil's brother Robert in a February 19, 2003 letter: I'm not sure what kind of information you would like to have about Phillip, so I'll give you my memories of Bob and his parents spending many hours reminiscing about Phillip and his growing up years. I think they

worked through their grief and great loss in this manner. I feel his father never recovered and was quite bitter.

Phillip had a very happy childhood with many friends and schoolmates. Since his father was an immigration inspector, they lived in small communities like Northport, Washington. It seems he was good at bringing his friends home and delegating his chores for them to do so they could be off playing.

He was always referred to as being well liked and intelligent, very willing to be friends to all. Bear in mind I never met Phillip, and I'm sure it is my loss.

From Doris J. Putnam, Polson, Montana, in a letter of February 21, 2003: My family knew the Clarence L. Mcveys [Phillip's parents] when we lived in Sweet Grass, Montana in the late 1920s and early 1930s. My parents . . . and Clarence and Lillian played bridge together. My sister, Allien, and I and Robert and Phillip would play games during the visits. I was the oldest. . . . I always thought Phillip was the cutest little boy.

The day in August 1949 Clarence was at Eddies Drug in Polson, he was a broken man. He had gotten off the bus and my dad happened to recognize him. He told dad about Phillip being in the fire and they were heading for Missoula and maybe on to Helena.

From Beverly Hamel, a neighbor of the McVey family, in a March 17, 2003 e-mail:

The summer of '49 [1948:ed] Phil and a bunch of his buddies joined the smokejumpers to make money for college. It was a fun summer I guess 'cause a bunch of the smokejumpers would come home on the weekends with Phil. So there were enough boys to go around for all us girls.

Anyway, Phil and I spent a lot of time together. We would just walk to the beautiful McDonald Lake and a park that was below the lake and just visit and kinda play around. He was 22 and I was 16. We were kinda crazy about each other. I guess we knew it wouldn't last forever. I remember the last weekend he was home and we sat on the 'canal bridge', (the large irrigation ditch), just above his place and talked for a couple of hours. The sky was orange with smoke from forest fires and we knew he would be taking off soon. We were trying not to commit any future to each other (I had a year of high school left and then college) and he had to get his education, so we just kinda languished in the moment of just being together and feeling the closeness and communication between our souls. It is like yesterday now, the feelings rise to the surface and I guess it is good because it is something I will never forget! He was such a sweet respectful guy, with beautiful eyes and a real nice smile.

Well, the guys left for Missoula that evening and I guess the next morning they were on their way to Mann Gulch. Seems we had a lot of fires that year and as I said the sky was orange from the heavy smoke. My brother in law Harold William Webbe was a friend of Phil's and a smokejumper and was to go to Mann Gulch but was sick the morning they were to leave. I often wondered who it was that had to go in his place.

The next I knew I was at his brother Bob's and the news of Mann Gulch came thru. Of course we were horrified and had to wait until his parents were notified at Babb, Montana (on the border) where they were employed. We did not have telephone service yet and his parents had to come down to tell us. It truly stunned all of us! The report was that the smokejumpers were told to 'dig in' and some one said, " to h--- with that I'm going for the ridge."

They said Phil's body weighed 69 pounds in the body bag. The fire was so intense that they died immediately. They identified the bodies by their apparel on the side of the body that lay next to the ground. It must have been hell! Of course we know that those that survived, obeyed the leader.

The next I knew we were attending the internment at the Ronan Mountain View Cemetery. I remember nothing of the funeral and little of the cemetery except it was military and when they played "taps" I had never heard anything so mournful in my life, then or since. It was beyond belief but it certainly makes no mistake about the person being dead and gone. It is the end of hope and complete closing!!!

I think Bob and I mourned together. I don't know for sure, as I felt numb. Anyway life goes on. We waited for the promised report of the circumstances. I believe that took about 6 weeks. Finally it arrived and we all went over it very carefully. It was interesting and I am sure there is a copy in the US department over [at] the smokejumpers. I asked Gerry about it and she said she had never seen it.

From the X-Cel Project, Helena High School, August 1999, quoting P.Clarence Ames, a boyhood friend of McVey:

I have only good memories of Phil McVey. His dad was with the U.S. Immigration Service and was assigned to the Northport, Washington border crossing. It was in Northport where Phil spent his junior high and some high school years. Many of us there were fortunate to have him as a friend.

Phil was always ready for a pickup game of baseball during those "long" summer vacations. If not baseball, he would think of other things to do. One very successful project that he initiated, at the age of 14, was to put on a "carnival" at his place.. With the help of several friends, including my brother and me, we set up several carnival booths including a penny toss board, balloons and darts, ball throw

at bottles, and bingo. Of course, this was all to make a little spending money so that we could buy firecrackers for the 4th of July time.

In the summer of '42, my brother was working at a farm near Grand Coulee Dam. Phil, 14, and myself, 13, decided to have a great experience. We would ride our bikes (no three or 20 speed in those days) from Northport to Grand Coulee to visit my brother, then continue on to Spokane and finally back to Northport. (A total distance of 400 miles.) With "saddle bags" on the bikes and a bedroll we made a successful trip.

Phil's high school class was very small, only six people. He loved sports and participated in baseball and basketball.

*Following is from the X-Cel book, Helena High School, August 1999.
Smokejumper Jerry Linton who trained as a smokejumper with McVey is quoted:*

I met Phil for the first time in the spring of 1948 when training started at Nine Mile, Montana. He was older than me and had been in the Navy.

I got to know Phil much better after our training was over and we were sent to a work project at Castle Creek Ranger Station which is about 13 miles southeast of Grangeville, Idaho. There were about 13 jumpers including two foremen that were in that group, and both Phil and I were in this same group. Our job on the work project was clearing trails, road, cleaning up slash areas that had been logged, anything that had to be done. We were always working together as a group, so many times Phil and I worked together doing something.

I'd like to say a few words about Phil. He was truly a good friend. He had a good sense of humor, was easy to get along with and be around. He was a hard worker and always did more than his share. We were all in pretty good shape, and Phil was exceptional and was proud of his strong, muscular body.

David R. Navon, August 5, 1949

David trained in Missoula in 1949. He died with 11 other Missoula smokejumpers in the Mann Gulch Fire.

The following is from "Some of the Men of Mann Gulch," Jenkins, 1993:

A composite of several letters by Anita Navon: My older brother, David Richard Navon, was born in 1920 in Argentina where my dad, already an American for many years, was selling farm machinery for International Harvester out of Chicago.

My parents soon returned to the U.S. and bought farmland in the Central Valley of California where we were raised. After Dad lost the farm in the Depression, in 1935 we moved to the bigger town of Modesto where David finished high school in 1938.

Seeking relief from the humdrum, David “ran away to sea,” working his way around the world for a year on a Swedish freighter. He returned in 1939 and entered Modesto Junior College, soon joining the National Guard to have some work income and military training. When President Roosevelt responded to Hitler’s rampages in Europe by mobilizing the National Guard in 1941, David was taken into the Army. And the war soon came.

David made it through Officer Candidate School in 1942 and as a second lieutenant volunteered for paratrooper training. Eventually he was sent to England and was with the 82nd Airborne Division when it jumped into Holland in the fall of 1944 (at Nijmegen, as described in the book [A Bridge Too Far](#)). He was wounded in that battle and invalided back to England just before the Battle of the Bulge.

After the war ended, having recovered, he was in the Army of Occupation in Berlin, attached to the 101st Airborne Division. When he was honorably discharged in March 1946, after five years in service, he held the rank of first lieutenant.

He then enrolled at the University of California, Berkeley, majoring in forestry. He spent the 1947-48 school year at the University of Aberdeen (Scotland) School of Forestry, and returned to Cal to graduate with his forestry degree in June 1949.

Our last meeting was an outing to the San Francisco De Young Art Museum. David was a museum goer, and a book reader, and as long as I can remember he and my father kept a stamp collection. His letters home, from wherever he was in the world, usually had some beautiful stamps.

Now some comments on the effects on me of reading Norman Maclean’s [Young Men and Fire](#): My first response was, though it hurt to read it, it was altogether a wonderful book for me. The book was a real catharsis for my long-unfinished grief about David. Maclean helped me accompany the men to the end and to be inside their shoes. I was moved by his dedication and the fact that he cared so much about the lives of the people we loved.

A later, perhaps much more minor reaction, was my irritation at Maclean for presenting David, inaccurately it seems to me, as “a free wheeler,” a “professional adventurer,” who was somewhat bossy among the younger men and who didn’t mind striking off on his own without authority to do so whenever the impulse

struck him. (Don't forget that all fifteen of Dodge's crew did that when they had no idea why he was lighting that escape fire.)

David was intent on a career in forestry. He had taken the summer job -- he said it was going to be the last jumping he would do -- to earn money; he was sending me checks to help me go to Europe in the fall. He loved the outdoor life, and was serious about establishing himself. His letters were enthusiastic about parts of the Montana country he had seen, and about the fact that he had been given some real forest work to do, cruising timber.

Yet overall I can't help but be grateful to Maclean for writing his book and helping me and millions of others be "inside our loved ones' shoes" out on that mountain.

(Afterthoughts on Dave Navon by Starr Jenkins): One episode of the summer of '49 showed how serious Dave was about learning his forestry: Short Hall, of Colorado A & M (Fort Collins), had a war surplus Jeep he had just bought and was refurbishing in the evenings around camp. On a weekend he invited two other forestry-student jumpers, Dave Navon and Jock Fleming, and me to ride with him out to the Powell Ranger Station on the west side of the Bitterroot Divide; i.e., just into Idaho. (That was before the Lewis and Clark highway had been completed down the Lochsa, cutting through a vast area of wilderness.)

Short Hall, as always, wanted to see some new, nearly untouched country; but he and the other two foresters also wanted to make that 100-mile drive to get into a watershed they had never seen before to get their first real look at a Western White Pine, the great wood for matches and toothpicks, important items for macho western men. I was along to enjoy the country too and to witness these three budding foresters' great enthusiasm when they spotted their first one.

"There it is!" "Yeah. Hey, ain't that neat!" A marvelous lumber tree that is getting harder and harder to find in our nation's dwindling forests.

I believe Dave told me he was planning to return to U.C. Berkeley to get a Master's degree in Range Management to strengthen his qualifications for a Forest Service or other land management career. Yet one of his more wild dreams was to persuade the wealthy owner of some large California coast island to let him manage that island as a big game hunting preserve where exotic species would be introduced and where well-off hunters could come "on safari" to hunt lions, tigers, Kodiak bears, rhinos, whatever he could get the owners to introduce and maintain on such a miniature wild world.

Luckily perhaps the National Park Service and the Nature Conservancy beat him to it with better ideas. But imagine; hunting Bengal tigers just thirty minutes from downtown Los Angeles. The company would have never run out of customers

Note: The place where Navon died in Mann Gulch is marked with a Star of David.

Leonard Leroy Piper, August 5, 1949

Leonard, from Blairsville, Pennsylvania, trained in Missoula in 1949. He died with 11 other jumpers in the Mann Gulch Fire.

From an interview with an older brother, Gilbert of Blairsville on April 13, 2003: Leonard was a Navy veteran of World War II and was 23 and single when he died. He was one of nine children – six boys and three girls – who grew up on the family farm near Latrobe, Pennsylvania. He loved the outdoors and his hobbies were hunting and fishing.

From an interview with a sister, Marie Liebel, on April 13, 2003: He was popular in high school and appeared in a school play. Leonard enlisted in the Navy while still in high school and served only in the U.S. At the time of his death, he was living with a sister, now deceased, in Missoula where he attended the University of Montana.

From the University of Montana's Registrar's Office: Leonard, a 1945 graduate of Derry High School in Derry, Pennsylvania, entered the University of Montana in the autumn of 1947. He was a geology major and had completed two years at the university when he was killed.

The X-Cel Project by Helena High School quotes Althea Piper, Leonard's sister-in-law, remembering the events that took place after the fire:

August 5th I believe this was a Thursday. There was a report on the radio during the 12:00 'clock and 6:00 'clock news. The report said that Smoke Jumpers had died in Montana. My husband, Garvin and I went to his parents home that evening, about three miles away, and not wanting to upset them until we knew more, we didn't mention what we had heard. And we didn't know at that time if Leonard was one of the Jumpers.

August 7th My Mother-in-Law, Fredericka (Grandma), had just finished having her kitchen remodeled. She had her kitchen set stored at our house. Her son Clair brought her over to pick up the set and at this time they still hadn't heard anything about Leonard. And not having heard anything either we still didn't want to alarm them.

August 8th About 8:00 a.m. Sunday morning as we were getting ready to go to

Church, Bob Joynter, a local forester called. I answered the phone and he asked to talk to Garvin. After a moment I heard my husband say “Yes that’s my brother”. We decided not to go to Church, but Garvin went into town and left a note on the windshield of their brother Gilbert’s car telling him to stop out after Church. They stopped in later. Gilbert, his wife Irene, daughter Myra, son Kenneth, and Marie, Leonard’s younger sister, were all together and were planning to go to a reunion after Church. They all decided to go to their sister Dorothy’s next and then to Grandma and Pap Pipers. All of these families were and still are within a short distance. Grandma Piper still had not heard. A lot of families at that time, like the Pipers did not have a phone. She thought at first with everyone coming in something was wrong and that it was her mother, Grandma Mikesell. Dorothy’s husband Otto Gaskill went upstairs to awaken Pap. He was in bed since he worked night shift at that time for American Locomotive in Latrobe, Pennsylvania. When Grandma Piper was told the news, she said that she didn’t want Leonard to be a smoke jumper.

We returned home to answer the phone and take messages back and forth. Leonard’s sister Thelma and her husband Eli McDowell lived at that time in Helena, Montana. Leonard was living with or near Thelma and Eli. Leonard’s body was so badly burned that they identified his body by Thelma’s house key. Eli’s brother Lloyd identified the body.

There was some confusion about the arrival of Leonard’s body, and later this was cleared up between Pap, Eli, and myself. Eli said that the information I gave Pap was correct.

August 12th Leonard’s aunt Marie Drum, Grandma Piper’s sister, called and said that the Body arrived at 7:00 a. m. at the Latrobe railroad station. When she called she said, “The body is in.” Viewing was that night and Saturday at Grandma and Pap Piper’s house. Funeral was Sunday at Hebron Lutheran Church. Burial was Sunday at Bethel Cemetery, Stahlstown, Pennsylvania.

Stanley J. Reba, August 5, 1949

Stan trained in Missoula in 1948. He died with 11 other Missoula smokejumpers in the Mann Gulch Fire

The following is from “Some of the Men of Mann Gulch,” Jenkins, 1993:

Bits and Pieces of Stanley Reba’s life by Mrs. Andre Anderson, his sister-in-law: Stanley J. Reba was born October 15, 1923 in Brooklyn, New York. Both of his parents, as best as I can remember, were Polish immigrants. His father, Walter

Reba, was very conservative and strict, definitely the head of the household. Stan had an older sister, Catherine, and a younger sister, Adeline. Their address at the time of Stan's death was 96 Newell Street, Brooklyn. This was, I believe, the residence of Stan's boyhood.

I do not know where he attended grade school but he graduated from Brooklyn Boys' High School, a Christian Brothers school. He received a football scholarship to Holy Cross College in Massachusetts and took his freshman year there. It was at this time that he joined the Army Air Corps. He held the rank of second lieutenant and served in the Pacific, Saipan being one area mentioned. He received the Purple Heart, but neither my sister Julie nor I know the details about how he earned this. Other medals he was awarded were the Asia Theatre Medal, the Victory Medal and the American Service Medal.

After the war Stan resumed his studies but this time at the University of Minnesota, School of Forestry. He began working summers with the Forest Service and began smokejumping the summer of 1948.

Stan met Julie sometime during the fall of 1947. (I was only 11 years old so I was not aware of my sister's social life then.) I do remember that during the summer of '48, while she was at home in our small town of Pierz, Minnesota, she was receiving letters from him, from Missoula, faithfully. (I was a nosey kid!) I believe he broke or sprained an ankle jumping that year. That fall, on October 30, 1948, my sister Julie and Stan were married at St. Olaf's Church in Minneapolis.

Stan would have graduated from the University of Minnesota in Forestry in June of 1950. His dream was to build a career with the Forest Service in upstate New York. However, he loved western Montana too, and that area would have been his second choice of where to spend his life.

As it turned out, Julie and Stan's married life was brief, nine whole months. They lived in a small trailer midway between Minneapolis and St. Paul where Stan attended university classes. Stan was going to school on the GI Bill and they didn't have much money. Stan took jobs with the Post Office and other organizations during vacations (Christmas and spring break).

After classes were out in mid-June, Stan left Minnesota to go to Fort Eustis in Virginia for a six-week period of ROTC training. It was during this time, I believe, that he earned his commission in the Army as first lieutenant. My sister, who was living at our family home in Pierz while Stan was in the East, was able to spend a short time with him. It was a brief little honeymoon, the honeymoon they had never had, and they spent it in Atlantic City.

Stan returned to Minnesota at the end of July and, after a brief visit, joined with his good friend Joe Sylvia to go out to Montana to rejoin the smokejumpers for their belated refresher jump training. I remember vividly the morning of Friday, July 29th, when they were to leave us very early for the long drive to Missoula.

Our whole family along with Joe and Stan gathered in our big old-fashioned country kitchen for breakfast at about 5:30 a.m. My mother made a huge breakfast of pancakes, bacon and eggs, homemade sausage, pan-fried potatoes. I remember my dad asking Stan worriedly if that smokejumping out on fires in the backcountry wasn't rather dangerous. Stan replied that no it wasn't, that he had survived World War II and that was certainly a lot more dangerous. I remember standing in the driveway watching Joe and Stan pack their things into the little Chevy my dad had given them to use.

Those were final good-byes, although at the time we were totally unaware of such a possibility. (I still have the Marine Corps sharpshooter pin that Joe gave me the day before they left. I had admired it and he gave it to me. I wore it in his honor on the day of the dedication of the Smokejumpers' Memorial in Missoula two years ago.)

I don't know what Stan's last week of life was like except that I remember my sister receiving phone calls letting her know that he had arrived safely and had begun the usual refresher training for jumping. I learned later that during that week Stan's mother had had a fearsome dream about him. The details of the dream I don't know, but it involved Stan's death. She was so frightened by the dream that she wrote a letter to him to tell him to be careful. He never got to read that letter.

The weekend of August 5th was extremely hot in Minnesota too, as it was in Montana, the difference being only the humidity. Early Saturday morning (the 6th) my sister-in-law came to our house (before Julie was up) to tell my mother that she had heard a news broadcast on the radio telling of a bad fire burning between Helena and Missoula and that my mother should say nothing of this to Julie. I did remember mother saying something aside to my dad, but for some reason we were all under the impression that Stan and Joe would have to complete a solid week (five days) of training before being jumped into a fire. Thus this bad fire near Helena would certainly not involve them.

My dad always listened to a 10 p.m. newscast before going to bed. That evening, August 6th, my sister came into the living room in time for the broadcast. The newscaster reported the bad Montana fire and the fact that a University of Minnesota student had died in the hospital that day. He then gave his name: Joseph B. Sylvia. I can never describe the reaction of us all in the living room that night. We all started to cry and my sister ran to the phone and placed a person-to-person call to Stan. The reply was that he couldn't be reached, that he was "on call." A

terrible likelihood filled us with fear: if Joe Sylvia had been on that fire so might be Stan Reba.

Thus began the all-night vigil of August 6-7. The Smokejumper Center had taken my sister's number and about 2 a.m. they called and confirmed Stan's actual presence in that fire crew but said only that there were still ten jumpers missing and that there were three survivors, the names of which they would not give. We all thought that there was a shred of hope. Maybe it was just that we hoped beyond hope that he was alive.

My mother, dad, sister and I walked over to our nearby parish church about dawn, August 7th, to pray. In those days they didn't lock churches, at least not in our little town of Pierz, Minnesota. I can remember thinking that Stan just must be alive. Of course he had been dead for well over 24 hours by then.

The final call came about 2 p.m. Sunday. My dad answered the phone and from my bedroom I remember hearing this terribly strange sound. I ran out into the kitchen to see my dad standing there by the phone, just sobbing bitterly. In my years of life I had never seen or heard my dad cry before! I realized, as we all did then, what the phone call had told us.

To conclude, some of my memories of Stan: The first Christmas, the only Christmas, they were married, Stan gave me a little gold locket, which he had picked out himself. Julie told me how he had wanted to select it himself with no help from her and that the suggestion of the locket as a gift was his idea, not hers. That beautiful locket was very precious to me and I would still have it but for the fact that I put it in Julie's coffin when she died 10 years later.

I remember visiting them, Stan and Julie, at Easter time, during my break from school. Stan was very busy at school but took the time to take me to the Como Park Zoo in St. Paul. He also, during that visit, drove me a good distance, during an early spring snowstorm, to a Catholic church so that I could attend Good Friday services.

I remember later that spring, when I was very sick, Stan drove Julie to Pierz, a two-and-a-half hour drive, so they could see me. This he did in spite of having a heavy load of tests to prepare for that week. Stan also taught me to eat the skin of a baked potato because "that was the most nutritious part."

Stan loved to listen to Tex Ritter and had an album of Tex Ritter with which he'd tease Julie by playing it over and over. She was not a Ritter fan, preferring classical and standard hits rather than country. But Stan loved to listen to my mother's records of string quartets, so he enjoyed some of the classical too.

Stan Reba, that burly, football-playing, smokejumping man, also loved poetry. One of his favorites, "Crossing the Bar" by Alfred, Lord Tennyson, was used on his prayer card when he was buried, at my sister's request.

I also remember that Stan wrote beautiful letters to my sister. I, of course, never read them, but I remember that she read parts of his letters to me, years later, when I was first considering marriage to someone.

As I write this I can't help but think of how much richer our lives would have been had Stan lived, not only my sister's life, but also our entire family's life. When Stan died, we not only lost a wonderful son and brother, but we also lost a wonderful daughter and sister. After Stan's death, my sister was never the same; she never remarried and 10 years later she took her own life. Tragic events affect so many and have such long lasting consequences. Writing this has brought into focus, once again, the impact of that very tragic Mann Gulch Fire, August 5, 1949.

Marvin L. Sherman, August 5, 1949

Marvin, from Missoula, a Navy vet, had three seasons with the Forest Service and trained as a smokejumper in Missoula in 1949. He died with 11 other jumpers in the Mann Gulch Fire.

The following is from "Some of the Men of Mann Gulch," Jenkins, 1993:

Letter from a friend, Tom Magee, Sr.: In regard to Marvin Sherman, Dick as I knew him. Dick worked for the U.S. Forest Service on the Lolo District from 1945 to 1949 if I recall correctly. Help was hard to get at the end of World War II. Young men and old alike did the job.

I met Dick through my two teenage sisters as well as several other young men who were running interference. Dick was manning Mormon Peak Lookout about seven miles from our ranch on Lolo Creek. I had a good saddle horse and the ranger gave me \$10 to ride the telephone line and trail up to that lookout.

It was like a vacation to me. I would talk my folks into buying me a case of beer; I'd put it on my saddle and head for Mormon Peak. While drinking warm beer Dick and I would clear the trail and maintain telephone lines. As the empty beer cans accumulated we would dig holes and bury them where the rangers wouldn't find them.

From that lookout you could look right down into the town of Lolo and see the Saturday night dance hall, The Rockaway. Sometimes we wished we were there

and sometimes we were thinking, “Hell, we are already in heaven; why do you want to go down there?”

The Forest Service had two burros, Gene and Ginny, which Dick usually had at the lookout to pack water. One could pack 20 gallons and the other 30 gallons. When he didn't have the burros, Dick would pack a five-gallon backpack and two two-gallon water sacks one and a half miles from the head of Mormon Creek every two days.

My mother, Audrey, liked Dick very much. The huckleberries that year were real good, so we made a date to take my mom picking berries. There was a short route but it was too steep for my mom. After picking our berries we walked the remaining half-mile to Dick's lookout. As the tower came into sight Mother said, “My God, does he live up there?” With the help of Dick and me we got her to climb the 30-foot tower. After she got her second wind she said she wanted to cook Dick a good dinner. I had packed enough up there to feed 10 people. Fun was had by all.

In 1946 I started to fly at the Johnson Flying Service, J-3 Cubs. Dick tried to talk me into smokejumping. I said, “Bull; if it's flying, I'm riding!”

Well sir, I say with deep regret that I moved to the Swan River Valley later in 1946, sawing logs with my dad, and I never saw Dick again, but we all loved him.

The X-Cel Project, Helena High School, quotes Ray Belston, Marvin Sherman's cousin: Dick was not only my cousin but he was also my buddy and my friend. Many a day we spent along the streams fishing together in the Big Hole and Bitter Root Valley. Many hours we worked together in the hay and grain fields, breaking a horse or branding a calf, or on the Bitter Root trapping the mink and muskrat together. I also spent many hours with Dick at the lookout above Lolo when he worked for the U.S. Forest Service.

“Dick” as I knew him (Mr. Marvin Sherman) was a very dedicated person to his family, friends and to the military and the U.S. Forest Service. He was ready and willing to lay his life on the line, whenever and wherever the call came in. He did just that, ladies and gentlemen.

The X-Cel Project also quotes Frances Middlemist: Marvin was a favorite with the men at the Lolo Ranger Station, but especially with my husband Ross as they really enjoyed one another, working together, etc.

One day a pack rat was caught in a trap and Ross, Dick and a third party did not know how to kill it, so they decided to open the trap, dump the rat on the ground, and kill it with sticks. I was on the porch watching – you have never seen the

hitting they tried to do with their sticks – but the rat darted here and there and got away. How I did laugh!

Dick would talk to Ross sometimes about how he disliked what he was doing. Ross asked why he didn't quit. He said he died each time he jumped, but he wanted to get married and needed the money. When the Mann Gulch Fire occurred, Ross felt as bad as if Dick had been his own son. Ross had also worked with Wag Dodge, their foreman [on the fatal fire].

Yes, Dick was one of Ross's favorite "boys" of his many, many years with the Forest Service.

Marvin's service was held at Lucy's Chapel on Wednesday, August 12, 1949 by Rev. M.J. McPike. He is buried at Darby Cemetery in Darby, Montana.

Henry Thol, Jr., August 5, 1949

Henry, from Kalispell, Montana, trained in Missoula in 1949. He died with 11 other Missoula jumpers in the Mann Gulch Fire.

The following is from "Some of the Men of Mann Gulch," Jenkins, 1993:

Mrs. William Hellman, the later Mrs. Gerry McHenry, describes Thol: The only smokejumper that I knew that was killed along with Bill was Henry Thol, Jr. Henry and I grew up in the same neighborhood. Of course, his father was terribly upset, especially with his knowledge [as a retired forest ranger] of working in the woods. He felt they had made very poor judgment on this fire, which I am sure was true. Henry Thol, Jr., was a fine young man. He came from an excellent family.

Following is from the obituary published in the Kalispell Daily Interlake shortly after Thol's death. Chuck Samuelson, retired Fire Management Officer, Flathead National Forest furnished it.

Henry James Thol, Jr. was born April 17, 1930 in Kalispell, Montana, the son of Mr. and Mrs. Henry Thol, Sr. He lived all of his life in Kalispell, attending the city schools and graduated from high school in 1948. He was a member of Trinity Lutheran Church and the Young Peoples Walther League.

Henry was in his second summer of working for the U.S. Forest Service at Condon Ranger Station and in June of this year began his training as a parachute smokejumper. He had completed the course and was actively engaged in combating fires when he lost his life along with 12 other men in a tragic blaze near

Helena, Montana on August 5, 1949. Henry had planned to enter Montana State University this fall.

Surviving him are his parents, Mr. and Mrs. Henry Thol, and one brother, John, all of Kalispell; his grandmother in Denmark, an aunt, Erna Thol of New York, and other relatives in Hamburg, Germany.

Also from Samuelson: Henry's father was a long-time employee of the Flathead National Forest and served as Condon District Ranger from 1936 to 1942.

Following is from the Flathead County High School yearbook for 1948, as provided by Franklin Schroeter of Somers, Montana:

Henry's high school activities included College Club (senior year), football (sophomore, junior, senior), intramural basketball (junior, senior), track (sophomore, junior, senior), senior ball (senior) and Ski Club (senior).

From the Excel Book by students of Helena High School, 1999: Thol was 19. On August 5, 1949, he was called off a roofing job along with the other members of the crew to board the DC-3 for Mann Gulch.

From Earl Cooley (Missoula '40): Henry Thol was the kid who worked taking care of the grounds. He worked around the base.

From Helena High School senior Tanner Jackson, September 1998: There was one thing that struck me about [Henry] Thol's cross [at Mann Gulch]. At the very base of the monument there was a small flat stone, very old by the look of it, on which was carved a message: "Henry ... you ... love ... always ... Sara." Although the entire message was indecipherable, the emotion expressed in those few words moved me more than anything else I witnessed in Mann Gulch.

Newton Robert Thompson, August 5, 1949

He trained in Missoula in 1949 and died with 11 other Missoula jumpers in the Mann Gulch Fire.

From the Pasadena Star News, August 10, 1949: Newton was 22 when he died. He was born in Alhambra, California, graduated from Alhambra High School and attended Pomona College. He is buried in the San Gabriel, California cemetery.

From the Excel Book, Helena High School, 1999: Thompson was 23 and a veteran. He had worked for the Forest Service for two seasons, but this was his first as a smokejumper.

Silas “Ray” Thompson, Jr. August 5, 1949

Thompson trained in Missoula in 1948. He died with 11 other Missoula jumpers in the Mann Gulch Fire.

From Bob Dusenbury (Missoula '48): Ray was a graduate of Central High School in Charlotte, North Carolina. He spent a year at North Carolina State, became an army paratrooper, served in Japan, and was only 21 when he lost his life at Mann Gulch.

When he was growing up in Charlotte, he was always camping, fishing and even trapping opossum on Briar Creek. His sister said he was always an adventurer and “went after life fearlessly.” Ray loved the outdoors, and quickly learned to love the rugged mountain terrain. He felt he had found the place he was always looking for, Western Montana.

He liked hunting, fishing and skiing, the outdoors in general. We hunted and skied together. One of his favorite places to ski was up the Rattlesnake [Gulch, near Missoula] where we had a rope tow that was operated by the rear wheel of a motorcycle. It was very noisy and unsophisticated, but there were no crowds.

Occasionally, Ray would stay with my wife and me in Missoula. We considered him family, and were very sorry to have lost him. I carved the grips on his pistol and the stock on his 30-30 rifle. He left those things and some other personal things with my wife and me. When he died, his parents asked me to return those items to their home, which I did. According to his sister, Ray’s cousin has the pistol and rifle now.

From Johan Newcombe, Thompson’s sister, as quoted in Helena High School’s X-Cel Project: Silas Raymond Thompson, Jr. was born March 11, 1928 in Charlotte, North Carolina. He was the son of Mary Entwistle and Dr. Raymond Thompson. Raymond grew up in Charlotte, attended local schools, and graduated from Central High School in 1945. Immediately after graduating, he entered North Carolina State College in Raleigh, where he was a student in the Forestry School until June 1946. The summer of 1946, through North Carolina State Forestry School, he worked as a fire spotter atop Copper Butte Mountain in Washington State. Here was where he decided he wanted the “wilds of the west” and to attend forestry school at the University of Montana in Missoula.

World War II was ending, and so was the G.I. Bill, so Raymond joined the Army to assure his college education. He enlisted in September 1946, was trained at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, and was sent to Japan as a paratrooper with the 11th

Airborne [Division.] He was honorably discharged in February 1948, and armed with the G.I. Bill, entered the University of Montana Forestry School in March 1948.

Raymond joined the smokejumpers at Nine Mile for the summer of 1948, continuing his education at the university in September. The summer of 1949, he had to attend U.S. Army camp for the first six weeks, then rejoined the smokejumpers at the end of July 1949. Raymond was on call when the Mann Gulch Fire started and was a member of the crew. He died August 5, 1949 in the Mann Gulch Fire at the age of 21.

Raymond always loved the outdoors; hunting, fishing, trapping, camping, hiking, skiing. He was a total non-conformist, a risk-taker, who had a love of life and living, and was very much in touch with nature. He enjoyed life as he lived it.

A Woodsman's Prayer

*Let me breathe the clean pure air
That blows only in the wilder places
Send me far from the tainted cities
Packed tight with mongrel races.*

*Let me quench my thirst
In pure crystalline springs
That bubble from the living rock
Shadowed only by an eagle's wings.
Let me follow the untrod trail
Roaming freely till the end of my days
And watch the dusty red sun
Set the heavens and mountains ablaze*

*Let me, alone, eager and forever,
Follow and fight the naked wild
And when I die, mark me down
For what I am – Nature's Child.*

S. Raymond Thompson, Jr. (1928-1949)

William Hellman, August 6, 1949

He trained in Missoula in 1946 and jumped there until his death. Bill was the squad leader, second in command, on the Mann Gulch Fire. He died of burns in a Helena hospital the day after the fire blew up.

The following is from "Some of the Men of Mann Gulch," Jenkins, 1993:

Hellman is described by his widow, the later Mrs. Gerry McHenry: I did receive a complimentary copy of Norman Maclean's book, but there were parts of it that I was perturbed about, and some of the information in the book was incorrect. One thing was that I was not just pregnant; Bill and I did have a son born on June 27, 1949. This child died a few months later, in November 1949, of a ruptured diaphragm.

Another thing that bothered me was the fact that Maclean stated that Bill could not remember his prayers. Bill was raised a Catholic and he had married outside his church, but prayers are not something you forget how to do. Also I question Maclean's statement that Wag Dodge did not know the names of the smokejumpers in his crew. For me this passage gave the impression that Wag Dodge was the foreman and the others were of little importance so he didn't bother to learn their names.

As for the backfire Wag set in order to provide a safe escape area: With the heavy roar of the fire no one could have heard what he was telling them to do anyway. These were just a few of the things that were upsetting about his book. Now, as to Bill's life:

William J. "Bill" Hellman was born August 3, 1925 in Kalispell, Montana. So his 24th birthday was just two days before Mann Gulch. when you lucky four jumped into Yellowstone and the unlucky four, including Bill, returned to Missoula in time to catch the Mann Gulch fire two days later.

Bill would have graduated from Flathead County High School with the class of 1943, but he volunteered for the Navy at the age of seventeen. He served with the Navy for two years and then transferred to the Marines, being trained as a combat medical corpsman. As such, he took part in many island-hopping invasions in the Pacific. He also served for a time in occupied Japan.

Upon his discharge from the service, after his first summer of smokejumping, he and I were married on September 18, 1946, here in Kalispell, Montana. My name

then was Geraldine Mather before I became Mrs. Bill Hellman. He enrolled in the University of Montana at Missoula, attended there for two years, then attended Montana State College at Havre, Montana, as well as Greeley State Teachers College at Greeley, Colorado. By the summer of '49 he had but three months of training to complete before he would have earned his degree. His plans were to become a science and botany teacher.

Bill also took part in the Forest Service ceremonial parachute jump as one of a select group of four experienced squadleader jumpers in front of the White House in Washington, D.C., on June 28, 1949. He had been hesitant to go, as we were expecting our first child to be born any day; but we felt it was a great honor to be asked, so he did go and our son was born the day before his jump, on June 27, 1949.

Bill's father, James Hellman, was also employed by the Forest Service, and did retire from the Forest Service.

Another comment made in Maclean's book many times was about the smokejumpers drinking at all hours and carousing with low class women. The only thing I have to say about that is I guess we didn't know any of those men that Maclean pretended to know. All the ones we knew were working in the summer for the money so they could go to school in the fall, winter and spring; and most of them were going to college under the GI Bill program. And they were working too hard to spend much time drinking and carousing.

The only smokejumper that I knew that was killed along with Bill was Henry Thol, Jr. Henry and I grew up in the same neighborhood. Of course, his father was terribly upset, especially with his knowledge [as a retired forest ranger] of working in the woods. He felt they had made very poor judgment on this fire, which I am sure was true. Henry Thol, Jr., was a fine young man. He came from an excellent family.

I would like to say that Bill was a great husband, and I am sure he would have made a good father. I have been lucky again with my second marriage to another outstanding man. Of course I am prejudiced about all this.

I am enclosing some addresses of former smokejumpers who were friends of Bill's if you should wish to contact them. If I can be of any further help to you, please let me know. We do appreciate what you are trying to do.

From the X-Cel Project, Helena High School, 1999, quoting from a letter by Jack F. Matthews who was a Missoula smokejumper who trained in 1948: Philip McVey and Bill Hellman were close personal friends of mine, and in addition we all attended the University of Montana. During the summer (of 1948) I dated

Hellman's sister-in-law, Justine Mather, and as a result I saw a lot of Bill and his wife Gerry on a social basis. McVey and I had a lot of interests in common, and spent a lot of spare time talking about what we hope to accomplish after we graduated from college.

My oldest son, Philip William Matthews, was born August 5, 1958 in Washington, D.C., and is of course named after McVey and Hellman.

Joseph B. Sylvia, August 6, 1949

Joe was from Plymouth, Massachusetts. He trained in Missoula in 1948 and died with 11 other Missoula jumpers in the Mann Gulch Fire.

Following is from an article by Rich Harbert in the Old Colony Memorial newspaper, March 1, 2003, and from Plymouth resident Herman Hunt and Carver, Massachusetts resident Jesse Revendez:

Joseph was one of four sons and three daughters of Peter P. Sylvia and Gilda Carvalho Sylvia. His father was born in New Bedford and his mother was from the Azores. They were of Portuguese extraction. Peter was a decorated veteran of World War I's 26th "Yankee Division."

Joe was a 1942 graduate of Plymouth High School where he belonged to the Science Club. He served in the Marine Corps from August 1942 to October 1945, with boot training at Parris Island, South Carolina and then an assignment to an aircraft engineering squadron at Cherry Point, South Carolina. Subsequently, he served in the Southwest Pacific and attained the rank of corporal.

At the time of his death, Joe was a forestry student at the University of Minnesota, a classmate of fellow Mann Gulch victim Stanley Reba.

The X-Cel Project, Helena High School, quotes Joe Sylvia's sister, Thelma Flanagan:

Born Joseph Baron Sylvia on October 10, 1923, he was third oldest in a family of seven – a happy-go-lucky sort. He enjoyed hunting, fishing, and living as we did in Plymouth – our back to the ocean. He was a wonderfully strong swimmer. Our childhood was spent on the beach and in the water – the ocean.

Joe had lots of friends all through school and he was mediocre in his school studies, having many activities. There wasn't a lot of money while we were growing up, so there was always odd jobs to supplement our wants and needs.

Then in 1940 after graduation, Joe enlisted in the Marines. He saw plenty of action in World War II in various places. We had four brothers in the service (three in the Navy). They all managed to survive.

Joe went on to college at the University of Minnesota in St. Paul. His curriculum was forestry. He used to send pictures of all the beautiful acreage in the West. It's no wonder that he then experienced the training of a smokejumper, and HE LOVED IT!

Joe was a wonderful brother and amazingly we all got along in our family. We sisters always looked up to our brothers. Sometimes I can still see Joe in my thoughts, paddling in his home-made kayak in Plymouth Bay.

Herb Crowell of Kingston, Massachusetts writes: I graduated with Joe in '42 and during high school we were close friends. I lived about six miles away on a farm and he would hitchhike down so we could roam in the woods. We would also skip school to go fishing, but [I] don't remember catching a heck of a lot. About all I can tell you he that he was a great guy and well liked by his classmates.

Lloyd Pickard (Missoula '48), during a telephone interview on April 1, 2003, said the following: I was from Plymouth, Massachusetts also, but didn't meet Joe until we both reported for training at Nine Mile in 1948. I was a squad leader the following year, and helped give the late arrivals, including Joe and his best pal, Stan Reba, their refresher jumps. They then went to project work at Castle Creek, but were recalled for the Mann Gulch Fire. I was supposed to be the squad leader on that fire, but Phil Hellman kidded me out of it. He said his wife was pregnant, that he needed the money, so I told him he could take my place. I helped load out the plane and then went on a three-manner to the St. Joe. We didn't get off that fire for three days and by that time, of course, most of the Mann Gulch jumpers had been killed.

From Young Men and Fire, by Norman Maclean, University of Chicago Press, 1992: Sylvia did not die immediately. Three survivors of the fire, Dodge, Sallee and Rumsey, found him on a rock, severely burned but conscious. Rescuers reached him at 2 a.m. on August 6. He was carried to the mouth of Mann Gulch by seven, ferried by speedboat to a road, then driven to a hospital in Helena where he arrived about 10 a.m. He died of kidney failure and his burns before noon.

Keith Alonzo “Gus” Hendrickson, Gerald Helmer, Robert Carlman, June 23, 1958

All three jumpers trained at the North Cascades Base, Hendrickson in 1947, Helmer in 1953, and Carlman in 1957. According to NSA records, Hendrickson jumped in 1947 and 1958, Helmer in 1953 and 1958, and Carlman in 1957 and 1958.

The following is provided by Bill Moody (North Cascades '57), retired North Cascades Smokejumper Base Manager: The accident occurred on the Eight Mile Ridge Fire, Winthrop Ranger District, Okanogan National Forest, Washington. A Twin Beech aircraft, N164Z, piloted by Robert H. Cavanaugh, was on a mission to drop a Merry Digger trencher, chainsaws, fuel and general supplies to jumpers who had jumped the fire, just 15 miles north of Winthrop, a few hours before. Twenty-two rookie jumpers had also driven and hiked to the fire. Foreman Elmer Neufeld led the rookies, who were in their second week of training.

The aircraft crew comprised squadleader Hendrickson, 29, squadleader trainee Helmer, 24, and Carlman, a second-year jumper and the Winthrop District's timber sales officer. Carlman was riding in the copilot's seat.

The accident occurred during cargo drop while a severe thunderstorm was in the area. The pilot apparently took evasive action to escape a downdraft. The aircraft turned sharply but was carried down into the hillside. All four aboard died from the impact and the ensuing aircraft fire.

Helmer lived in Sweet Home, Oregon and had served as a paratrooper during the Korean War.

The following is by Leslie P. Yates, retired Timber Officer, Okanogan National Forest: During 1955, I was the Timber Management Assistant on the Twisp District of the Okanogan National Forest. I was chief of party of a four-man cruising party in the Goat Creek Drainage of the upper Methow River. Robert (Bob) Carlman was one of my three companions. He was the TMA of the neighboring Winthrop District, and this was his junior forester year.

In 1957, Bob Carlman volunteered to learn smokejumping, so he went through the training with the regular jumper crew. After training, he went back his regular job of TMA at Winthrop. During the summer he also was to learn cargo dropping.

While I was still TMA at Twisp, I used smokejumpers who were at the bottom of the jump list to do odd timber jobs. One of the men was [Gerald Helmer]. I had used him for several days to help measure form classes and he was a very likable young man and a good worker.

The Forest Safety Officer, Paul Taylor, investigated the accident. He went to the site and, in addition to his notes, he made sketch of the area, showing the location of each body, plane parts, cargo, etc. He asked me to draft a map of the crash site to scale. His conclusion was that the airplane hit a down draft and rapidly lost elevation with no time to correct for it.

Down drafts are common in the North Cascades and local pilots fly on the windward side of slopes when flying low. The pilot was from Cave Junction, Oregon, and was more used to the coastal type winds and terrain.

A few days after the accident, my wife and I went to two funerals, that of Bob Carlman and that of Gus Hendrickson. Bob left a young widow with two small boys. Gus left a widow.

Following is from R.I. "Bob" Pino (North Cascades '51): Gerald Helmer was an only child from Sweet Home, Oregon. He had gone to a mechanic's school. Gerald and my brother Buck (North Cascades '56) flipped a coin to see which would fly in the copilot's seat on the crash flight, and Gerald won!

Keith Hendrickson was known as "Gus." His wife Cloe was about nine months pregnant at the time of the crash. Gus had graduated from Okanogan High School, went into the Air Force, and ended up at Fairchild Air Force Base near Spokane. He met his wife at Whitworth College in Spokane.

Keith "Gus" Hendirckson as remembered by Ed Summerfield (Winthrop '47): Keith was one of ten jumpers who trained in 1947 at Intercity Airport, Winthrop, now known as North Cascades Smokejumper Base . He was better known as "Gus," a nickname he brought with him from Omak where he graduated from high school that spring. I once asked him how he came to be called "Gus" but he claimed he didn't know where the name came from.

When we completed training four of us new jumpers, including Gus, were sent to the Wallowa National Forest for the summer. Lee Kahler was our squad leader. We were stationed at the Memaloose Guard Station on Hat Point perched on the edge of Hell's Canyon. We enjoyed some impressive lightning shows on Seven Devils and vicinity across the canyon in Idaho and heard about a lot of fire jumps out of McCall but we didn't get any by the time I left in early September. Our only jump was a practice jump in a field in the Wallowa Valley.

The trip to Hat Point from Enterprise was long, on a hard seat in the bed of a 2 1/2 ton stake side truck. We forded the Imnaha River at the hamlet of Imnaha where there was a young black bear chained to a post on someone's front porch. Then it was a long five-mile grind up 5,000 feet to the ridge top beyond the river.

The following year Gus was my jump partner. It was a slow fire year for us. Gus and I never had a real fire jump. We were dispatched to jump on a fire one time but it hardly counted as a fire jump. The fire was on a good road near a state highway and fire fighters had been trucked in the day before we jumped. We were just in time to help mop up. It was obvious that we had been sent to that fire just to move a stagnant jump list and get us out of camp at the Intercity Airport.

That was the last close contact I had with Gus. We undoubtedly worked together on projects in 1949 and 1950 but nothing notable comes to mind. We chatted in the bunkhouse from time to time but I don't remember any of our conversations. He did tell me how he spent the winters trapping in the Pasayten Wilderness. I don't know how many winters he trapped there.

A couple of comments on his character or personality. I was surprised that he had become a squad leader. He was a very competent man who could do just about anything well. He was a hard worker and extremely reliable, a good man to have by your side at work. But he was an easy-going sort who never pushed himself forward or showed any ambition for promotion. Maybe marriage added a touch of ambition to the mix or maybe his talent was recognized even if he did tend to stay in the background.

John Rolf and Gary Williams, August 4, 1959

Both jumpers trained at Missoula, Rolf in 1957 and Williams in 1959. Rolf died in his third season of smokejumping.

Former Missoula Smokejumper Foreman Roland Stoleson (Missoula '56) and The Missoulian newspaper of August 6, 1959 provided the following: On the morning of August 4, Ford Tri-Motor N8419, piloted by Robert Culver, took off from the Grangeville, Idaho airfield. Its mission was to deliver goods to the backcountry airstrip at Moose Creek on the Nez Perce National Forest, Idaho and to drop two smokejumpers on a fire burning on Pettibone Ridge. Aboard the aircraft were the forest supervisor, Alva Blackerby, smokejumper foreman Roland Stoleson, and the two smokejumpers, Rolf and Williams. When landing at Moose Creek to drop off the supplies before dropping the jumpers, the aircraft crashed into the trees at the end of the dirt runway and burst into flames.

Culver was in the pilot's seat and Blackerby in the right front seat. They both escaped through small windows in the cockpit but were seriously burned. Williams was seated on cargo in the middle of the fuselage beneath the wing tank that ruptured. He received fatal burns and died on site. Stoleson was seated next to the open fuselage door and dove out at the explosion. A tree, knocked down by the

crash and on fire, interfered with his exit, but though burned and bruised, he made a successful escape. Rolf was sitting to the right of Stoleson, but did not dive out through the burning tree. He received severe burns, and died in a Grangeville hospital later that day. Blackerby died a few weeks later from burn complications.

John Rolf, from Buchanan, New York, was 25 when he died. He was born July 21, 1933 in Peekskill, New York, and graduated from Hendrick High School in Montrose, New York in 1950. He entered the Navy in May 1951 and served until December 1954. John studied forestry at Paul Smith College from 1955 through 1957 and attended Hartwick College at Oneonta, New York from 1957 through 1959. He worked for the Forest Service during the summer of 1956 as a laborer in Oregon, then trained as a smokejumper in the summer of 1957. He returned for the 1958 and 1959 seasons.

Gary Williams was born May 20, 1936 at West Valley New York and graduated from West Valley Central School in June 1954. In 1955 he entered the New York Ranger School, part of the New York State College of Forestry, at Wamakena, New York. He left that school in February 1956. That summer, he worked for the Shasta-Trinity National Forest in California. He entered the Army in October of that year and served at Fort Sill, Oklahoma with a guided missile unit. Gary completed his military service in September 1958 after which he entered the University of Montana at Missoula for his junior year. He became a smokejumper in June 1959.

Dale R. Swedeen, July 8, 1961

Dale trained in Missoula in 1961. He broke his back when he oscillated into a rock on his first fire jump. That was on the Cochran Gulch Fire, Helena National Forest, Montana on July 8, 1961. The accident rendered him a quadriplegic, and he died of complications from that 31 years later, on May 1, 1992, at the age of 53.

Dale's brother, Dr. H.J. Swedeen, provided the following: A native of Sioux Falls, South Dakota, Dale attended high school in Rapid City, South Dakota, then graduated from Kubasaki High School on Okinawa. Prior to his accident, Dale had attended South Dakota State University and the University of South Dakota where he had been a radio/TV major.

In 1964, he moved to Florida where he completed his education, receiving a degree in nursing home administration. He moved to Mesa, Arizona in 1989 where he owned a hair salon, and where he died.

The ground crew reached the fire, so there was no reason to assign smokejumpers. The wind currents were vicious that day in the mountains. Dale's family considered

a lawsuit against the government, but as long as they qualified him for a disability pension we didn't pursue it. I think the supervisors knew we had a serious liability case against them because they gave us the "royal" treatment after the accident. The accident was devastating to the family. I think it contributed to the early death of my mother.

Dale was a member of the Lutheran Church and the Phi Delta Theta Fraternity. He also served with the Civil Air Patrol from which he retired as a major. He's buried in Sioux Falls, his hometown.

Kenneth N. Salyer, July 9, 1965

He trained in McCall in 1954 and continued jumping from that base each season until his death.

The following information is courtesy of the McCall Smokejumpers:

A Twin Beech aircraft piloted by Byron "Skip" Knapp, took off from the McCall airport on July 9, 1965, on a mission to drop four smokejumpers on a fire on Norton Creek, Payette National Forest, Idaho, about 50 miles west of McCall.

After dropping the four safely, the spotter, Kenneth "Moose" Salyer, began dropping their cargo. During a low-level cargo run, the plane plunged onto a ridge near the Flying B Ranch in the Loon Creek area, about 50 miles east of McCall.

The burning plane touched off a fire that hampered efforts of the smokejumpers to reach the area. A helicopter that landed near the crash site was unable to assist, so it returned to McCall shortly after nightfall. The following day, Forest Service officials and the Valley County coroner hiked to the crash site.

Although the exact cause of the crash is unknown, the plane may have hit a downdraft. Idaho State Aeronautics officials had reported severe turbulence throughout the area earlier in the day.

Salyer, who was married and the father of one child, taught industrial arts and coached football and wrestling at Fairmount Junior High in Boise. He spent 12 summers as a smokejumper and had more than 100 jumps.

Knapp, the father of four, a former US Air Force pilot, flew for Johnson Flying Service of Missoula and McCall. This was his first year as a pilot in the McCall area. At the request of his widow, Skip's body remains near the crash site, buried in the wilderness.

From Mary K. (Salyer) Sprague, widow of Ken Salyer: Ken was only known as

"Moose" in the jumper camp and by most people who knew him in McCall and Boise. (I was just about the only one who called him Ken!) After Ken's death I married jumper bachelor Lynn Sprague in August 1966 who raised our son, Michael Salyer. Lynn and I also have one other son, Joseph Sprague. Our son, Michael Salyer and his family live here in Boise and he is in the construction business.

Ken was born in Elmer, Missouri on December 21, 1934 and moved to Waterloo, Iowa as a pre-schooler. He grew up there with an older brother and sister and one younger brother. He graduated from East Waterloo High in 1954. He was a national AAU wrestling champion as well as all state in football and wrestling.

He discovered Idaho when he was on his way to a job in Montana the summer of 1953. That job did not materialize and he spent the summer getting acquainted in McCall and working a variety of jobs for folks with homes on the lake. After joining the smokejumpers at McCall in 1954 he returned to Iowa and attended the University of Iowa where he played football.

After a football injury he transferred to Iowa State Teachers College (now the University of Northern Iowa) in Cedar Falls. He returned each summer to the McCall jumpers' camp and stayed in Boise the winter of 1956-1957. He graduated from Boise Junior College in 1957 with an Associates degree, then entered the Army for six months' active duty.

On April 11, 1959, he married Mary K. Stuart in Boise and their son Michael Salyer was born May 11, 1960. Ken continued jumping each summer while he explored school options. In 1962 he received a wrestling scholarship to Washington State Teachers College in Ellensburg where he finished his bachelors degree in education in January 1964.

Ken had one year of teaching Industrial Arts at Fairmont Junior High in Boise and coached the school's football and wrestling teams. He also working as a referee for high school wrestling meets during the year prior to his untimely death.

He was always the happiest when he was doing his job as a smokejumper, and that was a great consolation to me and all his family at the time of his death.

Stan Tate's book Jumping Skyward features Ken as one of the heroes in the story. It truly captures the moral strength and character that was Kenneth "Moose" Salyer to all who knew him.

The Salyer family has remained close through the years and always treated Lynn like one of their own. Lynn was a special friend of Ken's in the jumper camp, and the Salyers have so much respect for all smokejumpers.

Bill Salyer, a champion water skier, was 9 years younger than Ken and has sent the following recollections of his big brother: I was very impressed with Ken from watching him beat every wrestler he wrestled. I remember his running a touchdown on the sideline and having to jump over the last potential tackler. Also, he once picked me up by the back of my shirt and carried me back home as I was trying to run away.

I also recall when Ken came home with a goldfish and some oysters. He said they were for the initiation into the lettermen's club at East High School. I asked what he was going to do with them. He said he had to swallow them both. The oyster would be on a string and would then be brought back up. I thought that sounded like fun, but a bit strange! I guess I would have been 6 or 7. I was really wanting to keep the fish!

I recall the year of the accident I was thinking that the next year I would probably not be skiing all summer and was hoping to be able to come out there. I also remember having a lot of fun going through all of the jumpers' training area when I guess I was 15. Especially jumping off the tower and rolling.

Arden Davis, Jr. May 11, 1966

The following is from Cecil Hicks who trained at the North Cascades Base in 1962, then jumped for the BLM in Alaska for six years: Arden had trained in Fairbanks in 1964 before taking 1965 off to work with a logging company in the Northwest.

May 11th 1966 was the first practice jump for returning jumpers. On that day we were jumping three-man sticks from a DC-3. The jump spot was the University of Alaska Experimental Farm field near College. The field was rather square, about 20 acres (I'd guess) with a strip of cleared land extending off the northeast corner of the field. It was probably about 100 yards wide, and it ran uphill into the trees for about a quarter mile. The jump spot was in the middle of this strip.

I was the first man out in the first stick followed by Jerry Fuller and then Arden Davis. Our spotter was Greg West, a new squadleader, who was being checked out that day by Tom Crane. We were jumping at 1,500 feet. It was a little breezy.

In looking back we were probably carried a bit too far when we jumped because all three of us ended up in the trees. Jerry and I opened fairly close to each other and immediately turned into the wind and held. We were still a few hundred feet in the air when we drifted backwards over the trees away from the jump spot. Jerry and I were talking and yelling back and forth during the jump and wondering why Arden

was running with the wind. He landed quite a distance away from us. We were only about 75 feet apart from each other when we made tree landings.

Most of the trees were birch, aspen and some spruce around 30 to 35 feet tall. Usually on tree jumps in this area of Alaska you made it to the ground crashing through the branches and brush with your parachute hung over several different tree crowns. I was able to slip my canopy off the trees by pulling upon a shroud line. Jerry yelled over that he was hung up. I went over to give him a hand, but between us we were unable to slip his chute off the trees. So we gathered up our gear and headed for the jump spot to pick up some Pulaskis to chop the trees down.

The rest of the planeload managed to land somewhere near the jump spot. We didn't see Arden at this time, but figured he was having the same problem unangling his parachute from the trees.

We picked up Pulaskis and headed back for Jerry's tree landing spot. It took us quite awhile to locate Jerry's parachute and we had to grid through the thick trees a bit to find it. When we finally did, we chopped down the trees, untangled the mess, and returned to the jump spot.

Upon returning to the jump spot, Arden still wasn't there. By now Tom Crane had arrived with a truck from the airport to pick up gear. He, myself, Jerry Fuller and Neal Rylander took off at a dead run through the woods toward Arden's parachute. We found him hanging with a shroud line caught under his helmet, his capewells popped.

Apparently while making a short letdown, he had failed to clear a shroud line [from under his chin] which caused strangulation. His feet were about two feet off the ground. Tom took out his knife and cut him down and we lowered him to the ground. Neal ran for help. Immediately other jumpers arrived and all attempts to revive him failed.

Although this accident happened some 36 years ago, it never really leaves your mind (or at least mine). I don't talk about it much, but sometimes at night I make this fatal jump again in slow motion in my dreams and wonder all the what ifs that could have resulted with a different, happier jump story ending.

Jerry Timmons (Missoula '62) transferred to Alaska in 1964 and later retired as Alaska Smokejumpers Superintendent. He also recalls the accident, and adds that he, Don Wahl, Roy Percival and Bob Webber also tried to revive Davis, but to no avail.

From the Coeur d'Alene (Idaho) Press, May 13, 1966: Davis, Jr., was born at Sandpoint [Idaho] and was graduated from Thompson Falls [Montana] High School

in 1960. He was graduated from the University of Montana with a degree in forestry last year.

The victim's wife, Karen, and two daughters, Beckie, 5, and Jody Lynn, 3, make their home [in Coeur d'Alene]. His parents live at Thompson Falls where his father is superintendent of Pack River Lumber Co. operations in western Montana.

The body will be sent from Fairbanks to Schrider Funeral Home in Plains, Montana.

Tommy Smith, May 5, 1967

Tommy trained at Cave Junction in 1961, jumped 1961 through 1964, and again in 1966 and 1967.

From the Illinois Valley News, May 1967: Smitty is dead. Tall, lanky, always smiling Smitty, who had been jumping out of the Siskiyou Aerial Project for five years, drowned while making a river crossing after building helispots in the remote Illinois River Canyon area. Smith, Rey Zander and Ronald McMinimy had parachuted into the nearly inaccessible region Thursday to build helispots.

After completing their mission, they were trying to cross the Illinois River to reach the River Trail. Smith, a powerful swimmer, entered calm water with 150 feet of line tied to himself, which was to be used later to bring a rubber raft with their gear across. He purposely drifted downstream to the chosen land place, still in calm water but just above the point where the river current gained strength.

As he started to climb out on the rocks, the line was caught by the current and pulled him back in. Zander and McMinimy, on the opposite bank, took the slack out of the line in an attempt to keep him from drifting downstream. As Smith swung back toward the other shore he submerged twice. Feeling the only chance Smith had was to be free, they released the line. Smith started through the rapids then the line caught on an underwater boulder holding him just below the surface.

The turbulent river thwarted attempts at recovery of the body Friday. Sheriff Snider said the first place to be searched Saturday would be a deep, slack water hold approximately 200 feet long and 300 feet deep in places.

Former Smokejumper Squadleader Larry Lufkin provides the following: There is a memorial flagpole dedicated to Tommy at the old Cave Junction base. Ironically, one of the jumpers on this ill-fated trip also drowned several years later.

Following is from Tommy's girl friend, Sandy Zediker of Central Point, Oregon: We were together for about a year before he was killed. He was a neat guy, the oldest of four children, two younger brothers and a sister. He loved riding his motorcycle and entering hill climbing events. He also liked his El Camino, which his dad kept. I met him in Ashland, Oregon where I was living at the time. Met him at the Safeway store where he was working. He thought the world of his family.

The following is from Tommy's mother, Floy Ann Smith, a resident of Grants Pass, Oregon, interviewed by Carl Gidlund on March 15, 2003: Tommy, our first child, was born on July 23, 1940 in Childress, Texas, and he grew up there and in Oklahoma. Our family moved to Grants Pass in 1954, and Tommy graduated from Grants Pass High School in 1958. After high school, he went to Seattle for a year and worked for the Boeing Company.

He then returned to Oregon and worked on the Galice District of the Siskiyou National Forest, and during the winters he worked in Ashland as a grocery checker while attending school at Southern Oregon State College in Ashland.

He was in the Army Reserves and during basic training he was the platoon guide. He was named the outstanding basic trainee in his unit.

He played adult basketball and also loved to hunt.

Thomas Reginnetter, June 3, 1970

Tom trained at Redding in 1967.

The following information is provided by Larry Boggs, Redding '63: On a hot afternoon, the jumper loft in Redding received a request for 16 jumpers for a 20-acre lightning fire on the Big Bar District, Shasta Trinity National Forest. The Oak fire was about 15 minutes' flight time in a DC-3 from the jump base. After dropping drift streamers the spotter, Bob Kersh, started dropping two-man sticks. Tom Reginnetter was in the next-to-the-last stick, to be followed by Kevin Hodgin and Larry Boggs. After Tom exited as the second man in his stick, Hodgin and Boggs were told to hook-up and stand in the door. The spotter noticed that Tom was drifting to the southwest with his hands hanging at his side, not on the guidelines. He held up the last stick and asked the pilot to continue circling to see what or where Tom did or went. Boggs's first thought was that Tom had either knocked himself out in the jump or did not know where the spot was.

The aircraft orbited about three times with a lot of radio chatter between it and the ground. Tom was drifting southwest into Oak Creek drainage but suddenly his

parachute turned 180 degrees and headed for the fire. The plane continued to circle until his parachute drifted into the jump spot, at which time Hodgin and Boggs were again told to hook up and get in the door. They jumped and landed in the spot, which was on the ridge next to the fire's edge.

Those who found Tom determined that he had a broken neck. The only mark on him was a red and black line, about 6-8 inches long (looking like a static line burn) on the left side of his neck. The day was getting short and there was no place for a helicopter to land so help or an investigation team couldn't be on-site immediately. Some of the jumpers worked most of the night building a helispot for the investigation team's arrival the next day and to facilitate the departure of the jumpers who would be relieved by other firefighters. It was a very sad day and a long night.

Steven Grammer, September 28, 1970

Steven trained at Redding in 1970. He died while a passenger on a helicopter on the Forks Fire, Angeles National Forest, California.

Following was provided by Jerry Zumalt (Redding '70): Four others died with Grammer, the pilot, a helitack foreman, and two Redding Hotshots.

Bill Martin, May 31, 1991

Following was provided by Jerry Zumalt (Redding '70): Bill trained at LaGrande in 1979. He transferred to Grangeville in 1980 and continued to jump out of that base until he died.

Martin was killed while evaluating a Bureau of Land Management Quantum Ram Air Parachute on a drop zone near Missoula.

From Jumping Fire, Murry Taylor, 2000: "They still haven't figured out what happened, but they do know he never pulled his drogue release. At the very last moment he went for his reserve. The lines were all out, and the canopy would have opened in maybe another second or two. He hit right on the jump spot . . . right in front of the trainers.

"All the parachute rigging had been thoroughly checked and found in order. The details were still under investigation, but the problem appeared to be on the side of human error. Billy was 34, married with a family. His death sent a shock wave through the small world of smokejumping. By all outward signs, Billy Martin had been a solid hand, a dedicated smokejumper, liked to work hard, tell stories and

laugh. The square system had been thoroughly thought out and tested, evaluated, and designed, but now someone had died using it.

“Billy was an experienced smokejumper with 234 jumps on the static-line-deployed round parachute system. He was killed on his 235th jump, his first on a parachute that required he grasp the rip cord and pull it.

“The preliminary report indicated that Martin had demonstrated a tendency to become ‘uncommonly excited’ in certain situations. It was also noted that during the square training he’d asked for extra practice jumps off the tower and in retrospect ‘had appeared nervous.’ The spotter on Billy Martin’s jump said he looked out the door and saw what appeared to be two attempts to grab for his rip cord. Billy fell 24 seconds from 3,000 feet. A video taken at the jump spot shows that during the last seconds he was in perfect body position with the drogue chute fully deployed and trailing above his head. Just before impact he had reacted.

“Roger Vorce, base manager of the Alaska Smokejumpers, told us later: ‘It seems like all of the sudden it clicked for him. He did everything perfect. He went to his cutaway clutch, then to his reserve – bang-bang – just like that. One more second and he probably would have lived. Two more seconds and he would’ve had just one hell of a scary ride.’

“Billy’s death ended the test program of the BLM square system.”

From an undated obituary in the Grangeville newspaper: William “Bill” Martin, 34, of Grangeville, died Friday May 31, 1991 in Missoula, Montana from multiple traumatic injuries as a result of a parachuting accident.

Bill was born Sept. 28, 1956 in Moscow, Idaho. He moved to Estacada, Oregon as a young boy and graduated from Estacada High School in 1975. He attended Oregon State University and the University of Idaho. In 1978 he went to work with the Forest Service as a fire fighter. In 1979 he trained in LaGrande, Oregon to become a smokejumper. He moved to Grangeville in 1980. He married Kathleen Keeler on May 29, 1986 in Vancouver, Washington.

Bill enjoyed hunting, fishing, trap shooting, and was the elementary wrestling coach for Grangeville.

He was active in Pheasants Forever, Cottonwood Gun Club, and Grangeville area wrestling program.

Survivors include his wife, Kathleen, of Grangeville; his father, Fred Martin of Gresham, Oregon; his mother, Ruth Korvola of Portland, Oregon; three brothers,

Eric of Portland; Mike of Detroit, Michigan, and Dan of Gresham, Oregon; one sister, Jen Martin of Seattle, Washington.

Funeral services were held Tuesday, June 3, 1991, at the Noland Funeral Home. Pastor Dave Bray of the First Baptist Church officiated. Cremation followed the services.

Don Mackey, July 6, 1994

Don trained at Missoula in 1987 and jumped from that base each season until he died with 13 other fire fighters on the Storm King Mountain Fire.

Roger Roth, July 6, 1994

Roger trained at McCall in 1992 and died with 13 others on the Storm King Mountain Fire. It was his third jump season.

Following are reminiscences of and tributes to Roger Roth by his fellow McCall smokejumpers:

Roger was born December 17, 1963 in L'anse Michigan, son of Walter and Carol (Haanpaa) Roth. He grew up in L'anse and was a 1982 graduate of L'anse High School. After attending Northern Michigan University for a year and a half he joined the National Park Service. For the next seven summers he was a trail crew leader at Isle Royale National Park.

Roger spent several winters fighting fires in Florida. Two of those seasons were at Big Cypress for the Park Service and three seasons with the Florida Panther Refuge in Naples. He also spent one summer working on the Arrowhead Hotshot Crew at Sequoia-Kings National Park. He was a private helicopter pilot and a master mechanic.

He enjoyed parachuting, the outdoors and helping people. Smokejumping allowed him to do all those things. He was loved intensely by his parents and family.

Despite working in the West as a smokejumper and fighting fires in Florida, Roger always found time to make it home and spend time with his family. He understood that time and friendship were the most important gifts one can give in life.

The world is a much poorer place with the loss of Roger, and while his uplifting spirit and his laugh can never be replaced, his memory can begin to fill the emptiness that is left in his place. In the outdoors, in the firefighting, in the

friendship that Roger fostered in all of us, we can hear his gentle laugh and envision the cheer of his smile and know that Roger is still with us, making the world a better place.

The thoughts I am about to express represent the feelings of many beside myself. Roger worked in many places throughout his fire-fighting career, touching or leaving a mark on everyone he came into contact with. The first thing that comes to mind when thinking about Roger was a person who was always ready and willing to lend a helping hand. He was one of those special individuals who always placed the needs of others before his.

He was a master mechanic and soon after his arrival in McCall he became the base mechanic. After work or on days off if you were looking for Roger all you had to do was go out to the parking lot and look for a pair of legs sticking out from under someone's car. There you would find him, up to his elbows in grease and enjoying every minute of it. Roger's love for people flowed out in his relaxed voice when he frequently said, "Just let me get my tools and we'll see if your car can be fixed." It usually was, with Roger's help.

I have come to realize that it is the different personalities and unique talents that make the jumpers what they are, and Roger had a very unique personality. Quietly going about his business with incredible passion, no matter what the task was. I can see him in my memory with a smile on his face, sombrero on his head, passing out glasses from his latest batch of homemade wine. Then he would open up and make us laugh when he shared his stories from years on the trail crew at Isle Royale and fire fighting in South Florida.

Roger never lost sight of where he came from, his love for his family and his hometown were very important to him. He would frequently talk about hunting trips with his father and their favorite fishing holes. He once told me that he wanted to build a log cabin in L'anse with a big porch and a hunting dog for each day of the week. I know that would have been one door that always would have been open. I had never been to L'anse, or met Roger's parents until July 1994. It was easy to see where his passion came from.

For everyone who jumped during the season of 1994 may we take this moment to reflect on our own lives? Are we living life to our fullest potential? Do we enjoy people as much as Roger did? Any one of us could have been in the same spot on that jump list as Roger or Jim Thrash. So in a sense Roger and Jim sacrificed for us so that we could continue on. To the people who never had a chance to meet Roger, I'm sorry. You will never know his laugh, uplifting spirit, never ending smile and passion for life. Roger will forever be in our hearts and our minds. Let's not waste the precious time, but remember the gift we've been given and live each day to the fullest.

We will always remember Roger smiling and quick with a helping hand. He came to us at the McCall Smokejumper Base with a wealth of expertise, knowledge and spirit. In addition to being a fire fighter, Roger was a helicopter pilot, a mechanic, and most of all, a willing friend and companion.

Like few other jumpers, Roger had managed to make fire fighting a full-time profession. Thus, his career encompassed the entire continent. Jumping the extended summer season in McCall provided half his career and spanned the western United States. For a sizable portion of the rest of the year, Roger fought fire in Florida and the Everglades. Roger was valued as a first class fire fighter in both locales, and more importantly he was valued as a friend and a partner in all of life's adventures of which fire fighting was only one.

Once a friend asked Roger's advice on how to deal with a problem he was having with his brakes. Roger diagnosed the problem and told the friend how to fix it. The next morning, the friend decided to confront the problem and walked out to his car. But Roger had beaten him to it! There was Roger; car jacked up, with the brakes torn apart! All that was needed was a jaunt to the parts store, and Roger finished the job.

Roger was loved intensely by his parents and he returned that love. Despite working in the West as a smokejumper and the East as a fire fighter, Roger frequently trekked to his home in Michigan to spend time with family. He understood that time and friendship were the most important gifts one can give in life.

The world is poorer for the loss of Roger, and while his uplifting spirit, his laugh can never be replaced, his memory can begin to fill emptiness that is left in his place. In the outdoors, in the fire fighting, in the friendship that Roger fostered in all of us, we can hear his gentle laugh and envision the cheer of his smile and know that Roger is still with us, making the world a better place.

Jim Thrash, July 6, 1994

Jim trained at McCall in 1981 and jumped from that base until his death. He died with 13 others on the Storm King Mountain Fire.

The following is from eulogies by outfitters Pat Ford and Craig Gehrke: Jim attended Pasadena College on a baseball scholarship and received his bachelor's degree in Spanish and history. While in Pasadena, he met Holly Kliever. They married in May 1973.

Jim and Holly moved to Nampa, Idaho in 1974 where Jim taught social studies and Spanish while coaching the varsity baseball team at Middleton High School. They moved to McCall in 1979 and both worked for the U.S. Forest Service. In 1981, Jim became a smokejumper and a professional hunting guide.

Jim and Holly moved to New Meadows in 1983 where they established the Salmon Meadows Lodge -Warren Outfitters hunting guide business. They had two children, Ginny and Nathan.

Jim became involved in the Idaho Outfitters and Guides Association (IOGA), and quickly established himself as a good listener, a critical thinker, and a reasoned voice. In the late 1980s, Jim helped guide a new and innovative outfitter leadership that resolved to achieve four goals: making IOGA a tough professional advocate for its members' business interests; significantly raising standards of outfitter practice; giving outfitters sharper and separate standing in Idaho conservation politics; and working cooperatively within the broader conservation ranks.

Very much at home in the backcountry, Jim practiced what he preached about the responsible shared use of our public lands and waters. Elected president of IOGA in 1993, Jim continued to work diligently for wilderness and outfitting. He worked for his fellow outfitters, whose businesses depend upon wild places all over Idaho. He worked for himself because his livelihood reposed in unprotected wild areas such as French Creek and the Salmon River Breaks.

Jim helped beat back congressional efforts to enact bills that trammelled wilderness. He kept alive hope of serious legislation to do what's right for wilderness and outfitters. Because he, other outfitters, and conservationists worked so long and hard by someone else's rules, something of camaraderie for a lost cause came to color these times. But underneath there was an unspoken bond: they didn't intend to lose the battle. This is how the conservationists and outfitters knew Jim Thrash. They knew his humor, his wisdom, and his steely resolve to do what's right for wildlife, for wilderness, and for people.

Jumpers also remember Jim Thrash as a very hearty, unique, and generous individual. Jim jumped for 14 years. He had 217 career jumps, and 123 fire jumps. He jumped in Alaska and nearly every western state. Jim had a special love for jumping out of Silver City, New Mexico. There, jumpers from the other bases remember Thrash's high spirits, his quick-witted observations, and his genuine kindness. While Jim's earnest sense of justice and fair play sometimes put him at odds with overzealous overhead, Jim remained an excellent firefighter, squad leader, and spotter. His sardonic humor found magic in the routine. His friendly, easy manner made you always welcome.

Thrash was skookum in the woods. He could hike you until you puked. As a jump partner, fire fighting tactician, camping partner, sympathetic listener, and accomplished storyteller, Jim made just about any fire a good deal. We will miss his humor and knack for affectionate skepticism. We will miss the annual “Thrash Bash.” We will miss seeing his joy at being a good husband to Holly and a fine father to Ginny and Nathan. His loss remains an unspeakable sadness.

A tribute by Greg Beck (McCall '78) for the June 28, 1988 memorial service at McCall: Four years have gone by now since I said that last “good-bye” to you, Jim, just before you went out the door over Colorado. At the time I so envied you, getting that first Colorado jump we both looked forward to, my loss, your gain, I thought as I pulled in your D-Bag. Yes it was my loss, my friend, that night I found out you were gone and I couldn't yet tell anyone, a horrible painful time. And as strong as people think I am, since then they haven't seen the many times the tears have started when I've thought of you and your family that you loved so much.

I've tried my best to give just a little of the love you would have given to Holly, Ginny, and Nathan -- tried and failed most of the time most likely, but how can I or anyone replace the love we lost in your great heart.

I'm not ashamed to say that I'll always love you, Jim, as a brother, a smokejumper comrade, a mentor in the ways of the wild, and especially as a close friend. You were my conscience in the wilderness that kept my Pulaski in check and my eyes open to things I'd never really seen. You reined me up short when I needed it, and encouraged me when I was down. How can I ever repay you for that this side of Heaven, Jim? This tribute is one of my many clumsy attempts at that.

I no longer jump, James. Can you forgive me for that? But perhaps you're happy that I'm home with the family that needs me. What I wouldn't give, dear friend, to be able to send you home to yours. I've asked God so many times why you replaced me, Jim, at the last moment on that fateful jump, why I'm here and not you -- a million “whys” with no sure answers.

I'm so certain that you, Jim, just like my father is near so many times. At roll calls I could often just about picture you, standing there on the edge of reality, trying to engage someone in debate just to needle them and me, irreverent twinkle in your eye, cowboy hat parked 10 degrees off course, sarcastic smile trying to get a rise. You always could set the hook that way, got me to foolishly tell everybody to shut up, when in reality you were the ringleader with that look of innocence, smiling “Who, me?”

So what can we do to honor you, Jim? Talk about you around the fire when the embers burn low and the fire in the traveler burns hot? We do that because we

don't ever want to lose you, and it's our way of holding on to a friend we've somehow lost along the way. We honor you by loving your wife and your kids and because we hurt so much for them, we bumble and stumble with words, and awkward hugs, and we'd all give our very lives if it would take away their pain. We honor you at our reunions in a thousand memories shared, in countless beers raised in your name, in the quiet reflections we retreat to when it just doesn't make sense, and the pain rises up again.

So now, at this memorial service, we gather the quiet strengths of so many who have shared your life, and others who never knew you but to whom you were kin just the same. We gather all that emotion, admiration, and love, trusting that God can minister it to you and to your wife and your children. You live on in all of us because we will never forget you.

Following are remarks by Joe Fox (McCall '81) at the June 1988 McCall reunion: I'm here to talk about Jim Thrash. Jim Thrash died Wednesday, July 6, 1994, on Storm King Mountain near Glenwood Springs, Colorado, during the South Canyon Fire. Jim died with 13 others including Roger Roth. So close to safety. So forever there. Jim leaves behind his extraordinary wife, Holly, and his two wonderful children, Ginny and Nathan. I hope you have a chance to meet this delightful family. Jim is still fondly remembered by so many of us current jumpers.

The last time I talked with Jim he was entertaining another jumper in his uniquely warm way. Jim had a knack for stalking and shooting down some rampaging, richly ironic human behavior. He then dissected it with devastating logic, seasoned it with alternative viewpoints, and salted it with genuine affection. Always, he roasted it over the fires of common sense. Always, he served it up in a feast of stories and camaraderie and humor. At the jump base. At our beloved wildfire camps. Sitting by a crackling fire, we would devour his feast of droll observations.

Jim loved to coyly observe the goings-on here at the jump base during the slow times. Jim noticed how, when overhead complimented some jumper on hard work, they would say, "He gives a hundred and ten percent." Jim reckoned that, to keep the math square, behind this statement lurked a dark implication that some jumpers only worked at 90 percent capacity. So Jim started the 90 Percent Club and welcomed in 90 percent of his fellow jumpers.

One time Thrash was assigned a particularly mind-numbing, useless, busy-work job. Jim looked up to catch others snickering at his misfortune. Jim, ever even-keeled, said, "A job not worth doing is not worth doing well." We still always say that when we are assigned a particularly mind-numbing, useless, busy-work job. Jim's humor still inspires us to cherish the timeless bonds of friendship forged on the fireline. And Jim's spirit calls upon us to do the worthwhile work of protecting

the wild places in the wilderness and in our hearts where we can take the ones we love, to hunt and fish and dream.

The last time, I talked with Jim Thrash he hailed me over to share another celebration of humorous logic he had just concocted. Because I long lived in Berkeley California, a city known for its quirky eccentricities, Jim had called me over to ask me whether I knew any “Channelers.” Channelers. You know, those eerie people like Shirley McClaine who imagine themselves to be ancient souls journeying through the ages by occupying a mortal body for a life time and then moving on. No, I said, I didn’t know any Channelers. Jim wryly looked at me as if a trap had sprung. That twinkle sparked in his eyes and his mouth set in that classic Thrashian suppressed smirk. “Well,” Jim said, “did you know any Channelers in some of *your past lives*?”

So here we are to celebrate on our past lives as smokejumpers and reflect upon those who have passed from our lives. We are to relive past moments with friends and comrades; to recollect our stories; to remember when we were young and strong and our vision and dreams of the future burned with the intensity of the fires we so fiercely battled. Soon our comrades will fall way from our lives like leaves from a tree. Faded and withered, do these memories rustle away in the slightest breeze? Have we moved away from that essential spirit? Or do those lives and memories remain an eternity in that vivid so long ago moment?

And what past lives and past moments do we remember? What galvanizing events in our smokejumping careers reside so calmly in the buried depths of our memory, only to detonate so unpredictably? Then that past memory from your past jumper life suddenly erupts and rips you from your present life and transports you back into that brilliant, unforgettable moment. The time the fire blew up on you on that scorching, hot August day. The time you had to cut down that unimaginably dangerous snag. That time when you were coming on final poised in the door of the DC-3, eyes focused on the Idaho horizon and feeling so alive. Have you ever been shocked awake by exploding thunder and made to remember all those past moments as lucid as a lightning flash?

Do you still dream that you fly above the horizon in your billowing parachute, chasing the quiet solitude a thousand feet above the wilderness? Do you still dream of steering your silken canopy into a forest meadow rioting with wildflowers?

So then, why did you quit smokejumping? It certainly wasn’t lack of adventure. Was it chasing that one endless Alaskan tundra fire where the only relief from the swarms of mosquitoes was the acrid smoke that stung your eyes and burned your throat? Was it too many all night digs on the Salmon River Breaks where your muscles cramped and ached? Was it that particularly arduous pack out of Chamberlain Basin? A torture so prolonged and intensely vicious that it remains

incomprehensible to others? So unbelievably cruel in weight, terrain and weather? If those were the best of times, why did we leave it behind? When did it become a past life?

We each have a hundred reasons why we leave those past lives. We must move on and invest in those dreams and visions of our youth. But that past life remains still so eternally young and enchanting. Our past gives us the strength and courage to face the future with the same bravado we once held for that long ago Salmon River gobbler.

It's time now for us all to lift that smoky veil. Step into those memories. Step side-hill across the ashen moonscape. See the distant jumper camp. Your duty is done on this fire. Time to sit with the jumpers by a crackling fire and devour this feast of life. Time to eat and eat and laugh and laugh until the hard day on the fireline fades into a comforting starry night. While waning flames lap at the summer moon that swims through the silvery smoke. And a thousand glimmering coals stare from the dying wildfire. Time to share our joy and our rapture.

I will tell you who still live in my past lives and who sits telling stories at that eternal campfire, who lives now in the hearts of each of us, wildfire warriors. There sits Thrash stalking and shooting down some rampaging, richly ironic human behavior.

Jim Thrash, you will always be a part of our lives. You will always dwell in those past memories. You will always guide your silken parachute into that forest meadow of rioting wildflowers where we await your friendship and wisdom. Your spirit will always soar when smokejumpers congregate to fly to their memories, their past lives, their sharp-edged adventures, and when they share the rapture of their stories of camaraderie and humor.

I want to welcome *all* of you back to your memories and your past lives and your youth that strode with the same vigor and fierce strength that never left your hearts. Your sharing of stories and camaraderie and humor best eulogizes those that died doing our proud work. All jumpers are unique and kind. When you share the spirit of smokejumpers with others, you welcome in my friend, Jim Thrash.

David John Liston, April 29, 2000

Dave trained at Fairbanks in 1998. He was 28 and a third-year jumper for the Bureau of Land Management's Alaska Fire Service when he died on Fort Wainwright near Fairbanks. He was on a refresher jump and his parachute failed to open.

Born April 17, 1972 in Portland, Oregon, he attended Gladstone High School, then Clackamas Community College in Oregon City in 1991 and 1992. He began firefighting on the Deschutes National Forest in 1993, and traveled to Alaska in 1995 to work with the Alaska Fire Service as a member of the Midnight Sun Hotshots. He remained with that crew until the following year when he was recruited to train aspiring hotshots as a squad boss on the North Star Fire Crew. His goal since he began firefighting was to become a smokejumper, and he was selected for the Alaska smokejumper program in 1998.

Liston's interests included snowboarding, camping, fishing and exploring. He loved the freedom and openness of Alaska. He and his wife, Kristin, had just purchased property in the North Pole area prior to his death.

His fellow jumpers remember him for his free spirit, positive attitude, and always doing more than what was expected. His family takes comfort in that he passed away doing something he loved.

Mike McMillan (Fairbanks '96) wrote this tribute to his fallen friend: Dave Liston smiled upon the gathering of people in the woods.

He braced his hands beneath the small round window and stood in the crowded twin-prop airplane. He wiped the sweat from his eyes and snapped the chinstrap on his helmet into place. His heart pounded as he tightened his leg straps. He had never felt this nervous before a practice jump. "Two jumpers!" boomed the spotter at the open door. Three thousand feet below the circling ship, Dave's girlfriend waited in a meadow known as the "Big Spot."

Kristin shaded the summer sun from her face and squinted at the plane buzzing far overhead. Standing among a crew of smokejumper trainers she quietly wondered why her boss told her to take the morning off just to watch Dave jump. Kristin's three friends from work seemed filled with giddy anticipation on the winding drive through the hills above Fairbanks.

"Get Ready!" The spotter's hand came down on Dave's shoulder and he threw himself into the wind stream. Seconds later he pulled the green handle from his harness, sending his parachute to the sky with a loud crack. He drew in several deep breaths and fixed his eyes on the jump spot. Minutes later he turned upon final approach, sinking below the treetops. The wind faded near the target. Dave knew his landing would be rough. His boots hit first as he tucked into a tight roll. His helmet hit next, the impact filling his metal facemask with dirt.

Dave's parachute draped around him as he struggled to his feet. He hurried to free himself from his heavy jumpsuit. His hands worked at buckles and zippers as

Kristin slowly walked toward him. Her eyes met his with a curious and beautiful smile.

Without a word he took her by the hand, the two of them wading through a sea of wild Alaska roses. The last of the jumpers landed as the gallery of onlookers turned their attention toward the young couple.

Dave steadied himself on one knee and pulled a small white box from his fire shirt pocket. Kristin rested her hand on his shoulder and knelt closer as he proposed to the love of his life. Kristin had carried her answer in her heart for years, feeling that Dave was unlike anyone she had ever known. His gentle spirit filled her life with happiness. They embraced and kissed sweetly, oblivious to the heartfelt applause rising from their family of friends.

Dave's journey to smokejumping began in the Sisters Wilderness of Oregon on an engine crew in 1993 and 1994. In 1995 he joined the Midnight Sun Hotshots and became an important part of an Alaska crew known for its fireline grit and toughness. In 1997 he was a squad boss with the North Star fire-crew. That fall he was chosen as a rookie candidate by the Alaska Smokejumpers.

He trained alone as he did for years as a state champion wrestler from his hometown of Gladstone, Oregon. Now running in the sub-zero temperatures of Girdwood, Alaska, he put hundreds of miles behind him with his distinctive toe-heavy trot. He did thousands of pull-ups on a homemade bar inside the small cabin he and Kristin shared. She worked toward her nursing degree in Anchorage.

During rookie training Dave impressed his instructors with an unshakable resolve to give them his all. Late in the three-week program the group went for an 'Indian-run'; a single file formation in which rookies are alternately quizzed by their trainers.

Looking for a break from his standard list of questions about parachuting procedure, geography and jumper folklore, lead trainer John Lyons was sure that he had his rookies stumped.

Lyons thought of his rare pedigree hunting dog, now just a clumsy longhaired puppy. He called the first rookie to the front of the line. "O'brien, what kind of dog do I have?" "Uh, some kind of spaniel?" Mike answered, puzzled and out of breath. "No. Give me twenty." O'brien dropped out of line and hit the dirt. Humphrey sprinted to fill his place. "Humphrey, what kind of dog do I have?"

In his Texan drawl Ty slowly confessed that he had no idea.

"Give me twenty," snapped Lyons. Ty fell out and began his push-ups. Dave

sprinted to fill the gap. “Liston! What kind of dog do I have?”

A wry grin crept across Dave’s face as he looked in the eyes of his lead trainer. “A mutt?” Lyons contained his laughter long enough to calmly reply, “Get back in line, Liston.” Dave had earned his push-up reprieve.

Dave spent his rookie fire season first jumping fires in Alaska and then in the rugged wilderness surrounding Winthrop, Washington.

On a salmon fishing trip that summer, Dave and two jumpers took leave to float down the Gulkana River of Alaska’s Interior. As thunderstorms moved closer, only Robert Yeager was catching any fish. Veteran jumper Rod Dow thought for sure he’d at least catch a cold. A wind driven rain pelted their faces, lulling the trio into miserable silence. Dave suddenly looked at his two friends and yelled from the front of the boat, “Man, is this great or what!”

They pondered their situation and the source of Dave’s cheer as they sought shelter beneath a large white spruce.

In the spring of 1999 Dave returned as an Alaska Smokejumper, traveling south to jump fires out of West Yellowstone, Montana near the end of the season. In the fall, Dave and Kristin lived in Rainbow Valley outside of Anchorage. A wind powered generator and solar panels illuminated their small cabin. They fed their wood-burning stove for cooking and heat. During the winter freeze they punched through the ice to fill water jugs from a fast-moving stream that ran through their yard. Dave built a shelter down slope where he often sat for hours in his poncho, whittling sticks, soaking up life in a land that felt like home.

That winter they welcomed a visit from Dave’s father. John Liston flew lead planes for the Forest Service, guiding retardant bombers to their targets for seven seasons until 1996. During a long walk through the snow-covered valley, Dave told his father he couldn’t imagine being happier. He lived in a beautiful place. He loved Kristin with his heart and soul. He looked forward to fire season and being a smokejumper again. Dave said he was living his dream. John was moved by the emotion in his son’s words and the bond Dave and Kristin shared.

Under sunny skies on April 8, 2000, Dave and Kristin were married in Welches, Oregon. They returned to their Rainbow Valley cabin before driving to Fairbanks to prepare for the fire season. Dave and Kristin bought two acres of land near the Chena River and planned to build a cabin of their own when the time was right.

On April 29 Dave sang happy birthday to his wife, kissed her and left for work. He was excited about the practice jumps scheduled for the day. Dave and seven fellow smokejumpers made the first of two jumps into a soggy meadow. Icy brown water

soaked through their heavy boots as they bagged their canopies and headed back to the base. They secured fresh parachutes to their harnesses, ready to make another jump.

The jump ship flew 3,000 feet over the “River Road” spot and began dropping sticks of two jumpers. As the eighth man on the load Dave was the last to leave the plane. He exited and pulled his green handle, but his main parachute stayed locked in its container. Falling toward earth he pulled the bright red handle on his reserve, releasing the spring-loaded parachute to the sky. What happened next can never be known with certainty. Dave’s reserve canopy became tangled in a rare and fatal malfunction. Cries from the trainers at the jump spot filled the air. “Open!” “Open!” “No!” “No!” Disbelief gave way to numbing despair. Dave Liston was gone.

Operations were suspended as experts from the Alaska and Boise smokejumpers and the parachute industry searched tirelessly for answers. One conclusion drawn was that part of the deployment system on Dave’s harness was wet from his first jump of the day. A key piece of equipment may have frozen in the 28-degree temperature recorded inside the orbiting plane at jump altitude. Several simple but significant modifications were completed before the BLM would return to jump status more than two months later.

Jumping fires was hard to imagine in the wake of losing Dave.

A memorial at the Big Spot drew hundreds of people celebrating his life. A jump ship raced overhead across a clear blue sky, leaving a single yellow streamer fluttering to the ground in the stirring breeze.

Kristin began the hardest year of her life. She returned to school in Anchorage for the winter, living with close friends of hers and Dave’s. Kristin’s faith in God inspired those near her. It was a faith she and Dave shared throughout their friendship, love and marriage.

In the spring of 2001 the Alaska Smokejumpers sledged a granite boulder into the forest where Dave fell. They built a foundation to hold the large stone in place. They mounted a metal plate on its face, bearing an engraved eulogy to their fallen friend.

On April 29th Kristin returned to Fairbanks to spend her birthday with the Alaska Smokejumpers. They gathered at the memorial and stood together quietly among the black spruce. Kristin made a cross from tree branches and set it at the base of the stone. Smokejumper Oded Shalom passed paper cups and water canteens in both directions. He spoke of renewal and healing in a shaken voice, his dark eyes swollen with tears. He described spring as the first chance for trees to draw life

from the thawing ground. The water they held came from birch trees tapped just days before. They toasted to their brother with a hint of sweetness in their cups. And Dave smiled upon the small group of people in the woods.