

THE NATIONAL SMOKEJUMPER
ASSOCIATION

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SMOKEJUMPER

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Message from the President



by **Bob McKean**
(Missoula '67)

THE SMOKEJUMPER REUNION held in August at Boise was a huge success! Approximately 500 people attended. More than half were smokejumpers. Others were primarily family members. Every base was represented. There were many highlights including tours of Idaho City, the Boise Smokejumper Base, and the Wildland Firefighters Foundation. Additionally, a preview of the Higgins Ridge Fire PBS documentary (about the heroics of Rod Snider and the 20 smokejumpers he rescued flying his Bell 47 helicopter) was an overwhelming success. Rod was present for the viewing.

However, nothing eclipsed the reconnection of smokejumpers with friends they had jumped with in their youth. Many attendees were in their fifth, sixth, seventh, or eighth decades of life and had not seen some friends they had met and bonded with as smokejumpers in their youth.

I spoke at the banquet and asked the group the following question: How many of you reunited with a friend you haven't seen in 40 years? Hands went up all over the room.

The reunion underscored for me yet again that smokejumpers are an awesome group. While it attracts people from many different backgrounds, experiences, and views, it seems to me those who become smokejumpers generally have at least the following traits in common:

- They love the outdoors and, particularly, wild places.
- They think for themselves.
- They are self-motivated and action-oriented.
- They are attracted to challenge and a level of adventure.
- They go on to do a wide variety of things after smokejumping.

No one is sure when or where the next smokejumper reunion will be, but I am hopeful it won't be too many years down the line.

This issue of *Smokejumper* includes several interesting articles worth your attention. The first, Good Luck on Your End of Jumping—Daren Belsby Retires, by **Conor Hogan** (NCSB-21), is a wonderful

Continued on page 4

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Smokejumper base abbreviations:

Anchorage.....ANC	GrangevilleGAC	MissoulaMSO
BoiseNIFC	Idaho CityIDC	ReddingRDD
Cave JunctionCJ	La Grande.....LGD	Redmond.....RAC
FairbanksFBX	McCall.....MYC	West Yellowstone WYS
		Winthrop.....NCSB

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NSA Director **Fred Cooper** (NCSB-62) says: “I will opt to have my magazines delivered electronically rather than via USPS to save us direct \$ in printing and mailing, not to mention your hand labor in processing.

To request email delivery, contact Editor **Chuck Sheley** (CJ-59) chucksheley@gmail.com. 📧

tribute to Daren who is retiring after smokejumping 37 years (14 as NCSB base manager). Conor has done a wonderful job of capturing the essence of Daren. It is clear from this account that Daren is held in awe and respect by those with whom he has worked.

The second article, *The Best Summer Ever Part 1: Aurora Borealis*, is **Norm Pawlowski's** (CJ-57) account of the summer of 1957 during which, among other things, there was a significant solar wind from the sun that yielded an incredible aurora borealis (Northern Lights).

The third article, *Smokejumper Training Thwarts Hijacking of Pan-Am Clipper 73—Jack Ridgway Story*, by **Chuck Sheley** (CJ-59), is an incredible account of how **Jack Ridgway** (CJ-60) used what he had learned as a smokejumper

some 16 years later to stop his plane from being hijacked in Pakistan.

The Forth article, *Salmon River Devil Winds*, by **Roger Cox** (MSO-69), is Roger's account of a harrowing situation he and his jump partner, **Joey Graham** (MSO-71), encountered on a two manner in the Salmon River Country. Had it not been for the quick, innovative thinking of Roger and the rapid intervention of other jumpers on a nearby fire, a terrible situation could have ended in tragedy.

These stories are part of our common smokejumper history. As such, each issue of *Smokejumper* is stored electronically through Eastern Washington University and available online through the smokejumper website. You are encouraged to add your story to this history by writing an article for *Smokejumper*. 📧

Daren Belsby—Good Luck on Your End Of Jumping

by **Conor Hogan** (North Cascades '21)

Here is a claim that some will find contentious: The founding of the Forest Service belongs in the pantheon of America's proudest moments, right alongside MLK's march on Montgomery and the moon landing as an example of our nation living up to its lofty ideals. The establishment of our national forests was a seminal triumph of conservation over corruption, of working-class values over corporate greed. Most readers of this magazine know the key characters: the boisterous, barrel-chested president Teddy Roosevelt; his passionate, peculiar chief forester Gifford Pinchot; and the robber barons who wanted to strip-mine and clear-cut the west. We've read about Pinchot's epiphanic hikes through Yosemite, about the shameless grafting of Montana copper kings like William A. Clark, and about the 1910 fires that gave Roosevelt the justification he needed to place 230 million acres under public stewardship.

Perhaps we've even imagined the more indel-

ible moments: Pinchot flattening Roosevelt after an early meeting turned into a boxing match; Ed Pulaski holed up in a tunnel with his men, threatening to shoot anyone who tried to flee as trees exploded outside; Roosevelt's barnstorming speeches that shifted public opinion to the side of the nascent Forest Service. As Timothy Egan writes in *The Big Burn*, the notion of federally-managed forests "was sweeping and simple as a philosophy, and maybe even obvious in retrospect. But this was a radical idea" that "did not go over well in places where a fortune could still be made from the remains of Manifest Destiny." No other country rivals America's public land, especially considering the pressure to privatize we have resisted. Our forests, magnificent and unique, are due to the bravery of a few early visionaries and the unflagging efforts of those who have come since.

Another contentious claim: The creation of the smokejumper program is the most remarkable,

important development within the Forest Service since its founding. Important for the money saved and destruction prevented, yes, but also for more intangible reasons: namely, for the quality of people the smokejumper program has attracted to the agency, who otherwise wouldn't have thought twice about joining the Forest Service. Here, too, we have our larger-than-life cast: fire guard **Francis Lufkin** (NCSB-40), hired to climb trees during the initial tests in 1939, who first leapt from a plane on a dare; stuntman **Frank Derry** (MSO-40), who made critical improvements to both canopy and jumpsuit; and early naysayers like regional forester Evan Kelly, who decried the whole experiment, declaring, "all parachute jumpers are more or less crazy—just a little bit unbalanced, otherwise they wouldn't be engaged in such a hazardous undertaking."

Many of us had this history seared into our memory on runs during rookie training, sputtering, "Rufus Robinson and Earl Cooley!" as a shirtless trainer demands to know who made the first fire jump. We've gasped, "Nez Perce!" when they inevitably wanted to know where. We've done countless sets of 39, 57, or 64 pushups, depending on whether we rookied at NCSB, Redding, or RAC. We've read *Young Men and Fire*, we've picked through this magazine, we've watched grainy videos of men oscillating beneath FS-2s. Smokejumpers, rightly so, are fascinated by our legacy.

Until his retirement last November, the jumper who had the greatest claim to that legacy was **Daren Belsby** (NCSB-86). Belsby rookied in 1986 and worked out of the Winthrop base for the following 37 years, including 14 years as Base Manager. During those four decades, he jumped 189 fires.

He married fellow smokejumper Sarah Berns (GAC-02) and rookied on the FS-12. He briefly worked with **Francis Lufkin** in NCSB's saw shack. By the time he retired, Belsby had been working as a smokejumper for nearly half the program's history.

Daren Belsby is tall and handsome, with broad shoulders and an enviable head of hair. He wears thick-framed glasses and has a nasally edge to his voice that gives the impression of a chemist, rather than the most-tenured Forest Service jumper. He

is also a rather difficult man to interview. Whereas most jumpers can't wait to tell you their war stories, when asked about memorable moments from his career, Belsby deflects. He venerates other, long-retired jumpers; talking about himself makes Belsby visibly uncomfortable. This reverence for smokejumper lore came to define Belsby for those of us lucky enough to work beneath him. At morning briefings, he regularly brought articles about legendary jumpers like Willi Unsoeld (one of the first men to summit Everest's West Ridge) or Allen Dale "Mouse" Owen (the shortest marine ever) and read tales of their exploits. By his own account, Belsby was a bridge between two eras: the mega-fires of today, with their drones and Firehawks and billion-dollar price tags, and the two-manner, out-by-ten-o'clock good deals of yesteryear.

Daren Belsby was born in Spokane, WA, and moved to the Methow Valley at age three when his father was hired to run cattle at the Big Buck Ranch. He attended Liberty Bell High in Winthrop, where he took Advanced Humanities, the most demanding course the school offered. At graduation, Belsby received the coveted Claude Watkins Award for Best Student Athlete. His former teacher Bill Hottell recalls: "Daren was the star receiver on the football team, and a natural leader at the school. His charming demeanor and good humor made him a friend of everybody he knew."

Belsby went on to study Classical History at Washington State. He excelled at intramural sports and won both the basketball and fencing tournaments. **Bill Moody** (NCSB-57), who hired Belsby after his junior year of college, remembers him as "a very good athlete, outstanding student, and student leader. He had a very competitive spirit. Daren proved to be an excellent rookie jumper." Belsby appreciated his trainers' approach to the inherent risks of the job: "They didn't try and convince us it was safe. Instead, they laid out the dangers and all the skills we could master that would reduce the potential of getting hurt." After two summers on a handcrew, Belsby was attracted by this pragmatism: "On the crew, we'd dig line along a cold black edge," said Belsby. "Jumping, I did what I thought actually needed to be done. This is out, I'm not gonna dig

here. This is hot, I'll scratch some line. That part really appealed to me."

Belsby's natural pragmatism in part explains his regard for smokejumper history. As he points out, jumping out of airplanes and parachuting into remote areas to suppress wildfires, despite being called a "crazy and hare-brained scheme," *made sense*. It proved, over and over, to be the fastest, most cost-effective way of getting firefighters on scene. "Do what makes sense" became the unofficial smokejumper credo, and Belsby used this principle as a lodestar during his career. When giving his recommendation for the new Base Manager, Moody touted Belsby's "ability to think and respond logically."

Other jumpers who worked for Belsby remember his impassive rationality, as he earned a reputation for pushing the capability of man and parachute. "Where spotters at other bases might want to throw streamers at the dry lakebed two miles away, Daren always dropped us as close to the fire as possible," remembers **Inaki Baraibar** (NCSB-98). "But he would never toss you on something he wouldn't jump himself, that's for sure." **Charlie McCarthy** (NCSB-02) agrees, saying: "We definitely saw the limits of what the FS-14 could do, some of the spots we jumped with [Belsby]. But that was the whole point. Get on a fire as fast as possible and get to work." Flying above the spine ridges and granite walls of northern Washington, Belsby developed a talent for assessing a spot's true features, regardless of how dramatic the surrounding terrain might be. After running the requisite risk-versus-reward calculations, he'd turn and brief his jumpers. Once he had reviewed the spot's nuances, Belsby would shout his infamous parting line: "Good luck on your end!" before giving them the slap.

Despite catalyzing the occasional come-to-Jesus moment in the door, what people remember most about Belsby is his good nature, and his dedication to the smokejumper program. "He's the sort of man who would do anything for his people," says **Guy McClean** (NCSB-07). "I could be on a fire and call him because my furnace at home went out, and Daren would drive to my house and fix it." **Dave Graves** (NCSB-86), who rookied with Belsby, remembers him as "constantly laughing" and being "friends with everybody. He

was happy-go-lucky, but also really inquisitive about history, and always kept a journal from his jumps." **Dave Colbert** (NCSB-88), who back-packed through Europe with Belsby one off-season, recalls how excited Belsby was to see the remains of the Berlin Wall and walk-through sites he'd learned about in history class. In true jumper fashion, Colbert still recalls the acronym Belsby taught him for remembering the three orders of Grecian columns (Doric, Ionic, and Corinthian): DIC.

I got to work with Daren Belsby for just two years. As a rookie in 2021, I stayed quiet around him, save exchanging pleasantries when I emptied the trash can in his office. But at the end of the year, we both ended up working on the Cub Creek Fire just north of Winthrop. Belsby was Division, I was a Heavy Equipment trainee. One morning, early in the assignment, Belsby radioed me over Command and told me to meet him at DP 50. Heart pounding, I drove along the Chewuch River, wondering if I had done something wrong. Belsby instructed me to get in his truck, and the two of us began driving up 8 Mile Road. Bob Cavanaugh's son had called and asked for pictures of the 8 Mile Ridge memorial, and the two of us were going to take them.

On June 23rd, 1958, a Forest Service Twin Beech crashed during cargo operations for the 8 Mile Ridge Fire, and the four people aboard died. Bob Cavanaugh was the 36-year-old pilot. Also aboard were **Jerry Helmer** (NCSB-53), **Keith "Gus" Hendrickson** (NCSB-47), and a local for-ester named **Bob Carlmann** (NCSB-57). There is a small plaque at the crash site, still scattered with bits of melted glass and twisted metal. As we drove the two hours to the memorial's trailhead, Belsby told me how another jumper was supposed to be on the plane that day but switched with Hendrickson at the last minute. In the wake of the crash, the jump list became the immutable tabulation we know today.

In between having me move the boulders that littered the road, Belsby reminisced about his own rookie year and the hazing young jumpers used to endure. As we cleared the trail leading to the crash site, Belsby recounted injuries he'd witnessed and stressed the importance of a good PLF. While ex-

aming a charred chunk of fuselage, Belsby asked how my first year had gone and why I'd decided to jump in the first place. My replies were brief. I wanted Belsby to keep talking. I wanted to absorb as much as I could.

That afternoon is one of my favorite memories from my first year. Belsby told me about the infamous, decommissioned rookie sidewalk at NCSB, about tree climbing back east, and about a rookie bro of his who snapped and attacked a trainer. He told me about a stabbing that occurred on said rookie sidewalk, about old spike bases, and about the mandatory tree-up that used to be required for the graduation jump. Listening to Belsby's stories, along with graduating training and jumping my first fire, made me feel more a part of the smoke-jumping tradition than anything else.

The smokejumper program, the Forest Service, and the United States are all at a crossroads, and all face a similar problem: an uncertainty about their role in the future. The Forest Service jump program faces the rapid decrease of roadless areas in the lower 48, the challenges of transitioning to a new parachute system, and the development of a Super Puma rappel platform that could soon rival fixed-wing aircraft in speed, range, and payload. The Forest Service is suffering from a steady exodus from the grossly underpaid rank-and-file, legal attacks from well-meaning but misguided environmental groups, and a combination of explosive conditions that year after year lead to unprecedented fire behavior. The United States is grappling with the collapse of its role as sole global superpower, an increasingly cynical citizenry, and the multifarious dangers presented by climate change. Amidst these difficulties, all three organizations are struggling to cohere around a central narrative. Who are we? What is our purpose in this emerging world? What, exactly, are we trying to do?

In the June 2021 issue of *Harpers*, author Greg Jackson published a piece, titled "Prayers For a Just War," in which he situates climate change as our generation's "Thermopylae, Agincort, [and] Trafalgar" as the defining fight of our age. Interspersed through the article are arresting images of wildfires in California, Oregon, and Australia. Jackson writes about the pervasive division and disaffection endemic to modern culture:

Our primary way of interacting with the world is through a screen, and our principal avenue to changing anything appears to be typing into or clicking on that screen. We are alienated from the earth, from our hands, and from one another. We appear to be part of an efficient system that has brought ever more and cheaper goods to market, but our skills have become specialized to the point of practical uselessness... There is a maddening abstraction to our reality, a virtuality to all life.

As readers of this magazine know, there is nothing abstract or virtual about trying to line a going wildfire. You either catch it, or you don't, using whatever skills you've developed, from basic mechanics to navigation to communication. Few work environments rival the camaraderie of a fire crew or smokejumper base. The dynamic of working hard out in the woods towards a mutual goal satisfies some primeval urge. It creates a bond that doesn't form in a cubicle.

So here is one final claim: If we want the United States to thrive in the 21st century, the Forest Service and its smokejumper program must reassume their former preeminence. As Belsby recalls: "The Forest Service was, just a few decades ago, *the* most attractive governmental organization to work for. Now, it ranks somewhere near the bottom." According to a recent survey by the Partnership for Public Service, the Forest Service ranks 420th out of 432 federal agencies in terms of employee satisfaction. This abysmal score is partly due to a felt sense that we have no overarching vision, no sense of purpose beyond securing the bare minimum of funding for the following year. It feels like we are just keeping our head above water when we should be steering the ship.

President Biden recently released his America the Beautiful Plan, which aims to "restore, connect, and conserve" 30 percent of America's land by 2030. Author George Monbiot notes in the August 16, 2022, issue of *The Guardian*: "Perhaps the most important of all environmental issues is land use. Every hectare we use for extractive industries is a hectare of land that can't support wild forests, savannahs, wetlands, natural grasslands, and other crucial ecosystems." Our biome is a complex, interwoven structure. As ecological communities collapse, catastrophic outcomes domino

and accelerate. Dust bowls, desertification, drought: the stakes are existential. The Forest Service manages 193 million acres of land, or about 9 percent of the contiguous United States. The Forest Service's budget in 2021 was 7.4 billion dollars, or about 0.4 percent of the Department of Defense's budget. Is the health of our drone-strike program really worth over two hundred times the health of our forests?

Many of us who work for the Forest Service feel frustrated with our employer. Low wages, the exploitation of seasonal employees, and a Kafkaesque bureaucracy have led to cyclical resignations and a shrinking applicant pool. But right now, we have an opportunity. The new wildland firefighter job series could either be a stopgap measure that barely keeps us afloat, or the first in a series of reforms that revolutionize what land management means in the United States. What if we began to view the Forest Service, in the era of climate change, as *the* most important governmental agency? What if we took seriously the implication of our mission: caring for some of the largest remaining swaths of forest on the planet, at a moment when the fate of humanity is inextricably tied to the fate of trees? What if we took a cue from our forefathers like Pinchot and Lufkin? What if we, too, risked looking "crazy and hare-brained"?

The two main problems confronting America

are the problem of meaning and the problem of the climate. We have a population suffering from depression, abusing opiates, and self-describing as profoundly lonely. We have an atmosphere choking to death on carbon dioxide. In "Prayers for a Just War," Jackson writes about the adventure and fellowship men often discover in combat. He laments the "psychological damage" working a pointless job produces, especially when there are history-defining problems that desperately require manpower to solve. He writes about the sense of "intensity, solidarity, and belonging" people feel on the battlefield, and asks whether it would be possible to "somehow reap [war's] positive benefits without enduring the crucible of so terrible, destructive, and dehumanizing an experience." He wonders whether we could make climate change the enemy and find a sense of common purpose in our efforts to vanquish it.

The Forest Service is uniquely positioned to offer just such a framework. What if we created a modern G.I. Bill, but instead of fighting overseas, young men and women were financially and socially incentivized to work on a fire crew, fuels crew, or trails crew? What if we massively expanded the acreage of our forests, and the subsequent volume of carbon-capturing biomass? Where would the smokejumper program be, if instead of 2.7 percent of American land was wilderness, it was 27 percent? What might our society look

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 - Silver City
- Tom Carlsen Film on Smokejumping (1939)
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like, decades down the line, if entire generations had spent three or four summers working in the woods?

Bill Moody, when asked to describe Daren Belsby, calls him a “Keeper of the Flame”: someone who “perpetuates the [smokejumper] legacy, a legacy initiated during the 1939 experimental project.” Belsby, in his 40 years with the Forest Service, continued the work started by those early pioneers. He kept North Cascades Smokejumper Base open during agency-wide budget cuts and closures, amidst a growing culture of risk-aversion. He campaigned for the continued utility of smokejumpers, even as our response footprint shrank. He mentored dozens of young people who passed through NCSB over the years. The Forest Service is incalculably better off for his efforts. Daren Belsby belongs to a lineage that includes Gifford Pinchot and Francis Lufkin, Edward Abbey and John Muir, Aldo

Bill Moody, when asked to describe Daren Belsby, calls him a “Keeper of the Flame”: someone who “perpetuates the [smokejumper] legacy, a legacy initiated during the 1939 experimental project.” Belsby, in his 40 years with the Forest Service, continued the work started by those early pioneers.

Leopold, and Bob Marshall.

So do we. Those of us at the beginning of our careers would do well to remember our history, to honor the bravery and efforts of our forefathers. Much about the smokejumper program, the Forest Service, and the United States will be decided in the next few years. Smokejumpers might quietly slide into obsolescence. Or perhaps we will realize that rapid initial attack, combined with a dynamic fuels-treatment program, should be the model for modern fire management. Perhaps we will realize that across all firefighting agencies, the only reason many

of the best hotshots and rappellers are still fighting fire at all is for a chance to rookie at a smokejumper base, and that if smokejumping goes extinct, the immediate loss of talent will be catastrophic.

The Forest Service might continue to rank last in employee satisfaction surveys, bleed money, and hemorrhage people. Or we will seize this moment, when wildfire is in the spotlight more than ever, and ask the public a very basic question: Do you want a future with trees, or without? If they’d like their children to breathe clean air, much less hike and fish and camp, then the distribution of our tax dollars should reflect that

The United States might continue to fracture along partisan lines, as our people grow more anxious, isolated, and disaffected. Or we will rediscover the value of sweat and sacrifice, the pride and friendship that working hard, out in nature, can foster. Instead of being terrified by the climate challenge, we will remember what Gifford Pinchot and Francis Lufkin knew, what Daren Belsby still preaches: confronting challenges are what make life worth living. To quote Ed Murrow: “We will not be driven by fear into an age of unreason if we dig deep in our history and our doctrine and remember that we are not descended from fearful men—not from men who feared to write, to speak, to associate, and to defend causes that were, for the moment, unpopular.”

We who work in land management are descendants of America’s greatest and most unlikely tradition. Caring for the earth must precede all other concerns, because everything depends on her fragile, ailing health. Our doctrine runs contrary to the deranged, destructive currents of the age. Our inheritance is the mighty old growth of the Sierras, the briny air of the Olympics, the turquoise water of the Rockies. Since our founding, we have risked unpopularity because our mission demands that we challenge the greedy and powerful few for the good of the many. Daren Belsby knew the mantle he held as a Forest Service Base Manager, knew the weight of the responsibility. As he passes this responsibility along, he nervously, but with great hope, wishes the rest of us luck. 🙏

The Docent Of The Gobi And North Cascades

by **Bill Moody** (North Cascades '57)

The docent—museum guide—is an ex-jumper, comes from an Irish heritage, plays the bagpipes, is a cowboy poet, leads the U.S. Cavalry Little Big Horn re-enactment, trained in the U.S. Army Special Forces in horsemanship and mule packing, and more.

He has a passion for telling the smokejumper story and is a true “keeper of the flame.” Who is this incredible person? He’s **John Doran** (NCSB-72).

A call for a docent

Responding to a call for volunteers to staff the newly developed Siskiyou Smokejumper Museum, he answered the call. He had jumped fires out of the base in the 1970s. He liked the base atmosphere and liked the Gobi jumpers he had worked with during his jumper days.

At age 70 – 50 years after his rookie year at North Cascades – he makes four roundtrips a year from his 20-acre ranch in the Methow Valley, on the east slope of the North Cascades, to and from the Gobi. That’s 5,280 miles and 88 hours on the road to serve as volunteer docent for the Siskiyou Smokejumper Base Museum. He usually does a one-to two-week tour. John

figures that he has spent more time on the Gobi than he did in his three years at NCSB.

Gary Buck (CJ-66), speaking for the Siskiyou Smokejumper Base Museum, said, “John has been very generous with his time to help us with the museum. He is accomplished at entertaining the guests and hosting the museum.

“He is dedicated to smokejumping and firefighting history. The tourists really enjoy his tours, and he is an excellent storyteller. John traveled many times down to the museum to help us out. He drives a long way to support our museum effort.

“We also know that John is generous with his time, leading horse camps, cooking, cowboy poetry, and cavalry schools. He also has been hosting the Traveling Museum honoring all smokejumpers. He has made a very unselfish effort to help us and the smokejumper program.”

Why does John do it? He responded: “Being a natural historian, I like to share the great history and adventure of smokejumping. It’s so rewarding when a former jumper engages in conversation about ‘his jumping days,’ or a relative of a former jumper sees a picture of a relative in the photo

exhibit – ‘back in the days’ – or they share their secondhand jumper stories passed down to the family.”

In addition to being a “Gobi docent,” he is also the North Cascades docent, managing one of the Smokejumper Traveling Museum kits. Since bringing the exhibit to Washington, John has hosted multiple exhibits in the Methow Valley, and most recently at the Okanogan County Fair – all with great reviews.

A boy’s dream comes true

As a young boy, John wanted to be a fireman. In high school he joined the Twisp Volunteer Fire Department and when the department partnered with the local Forest Service on wildland fires, he volunteered to stay on the fire until it was declared out. Although only 16, he convinced the incident commander that he was 18 years old.

John went to Australia where he worked on a fire crew at age 18. Upon return to home in 1972, he applied for and was accepted as a rookie smokejumper at NCSB.

After three years of jumping, with 72 total jumps – including 35 fire jumps and one rescue jump – John joined the Wenatchee Fire Department

where he became a rescue team instructor on the department's fire rescue team. John used his NCSB contacts to modify jumper harnesses for use in fire department rescue work.

A near-fatal fire-related explosion injured John's cervical and lumbar vertebrae and damaged his spinal cord. John underwent five back surgeries. He retired from the fire department in 1990 for his next adventures.

From fireman to cowboy/U.S. Cavalry

Back on the ranch working with his father, and between his 13 subsequent back/neck surgeries, John bought North Cascades Outfitters. The business was started by ex-smoke-jumper and long-time outfitter **Tom Graves** (NCSB-49).

Along with being an outfitter, John was a cowboy for Warner Bros. movies. This launched him on his next career in 1998. He sold the outfitter business and started a U.S. Cavalry school for training civilians to be 1870s U.S. Cavalry members for movies and battlefield re-enactments. John and his cavalry men have participated in several reenactments of Custer's Last Stand Battle at the annual Battle of the Little Big Horn reenactment.

U.S. Special Forces learn horsemanship and packing mules

Doran's Methow Valley ranch was the venue for training U.S. Army Special Forces soldiers in 2011, covering how

to handle, care for, pack and ride horse and mules. The weeklong course prepared the soldiers for logistical operations in Afghanistan – operations requiring pack stock – similar to what was done in Afghanistan in 2001.

82nd Airborne jump on Custer battlefield

The U.S. Special Force's course led to John's association with the U.S. Army 82nd Airborne Division for which he organized staff rides on the Little Big Horn Battlefield. This, in turn, led to working with the Army Pathfinders in planning for a successful airborne assault on the Custer Battlefield – and the 63 Pathfinders gaining a deep respect for smokejumpers.

Although only 16, he convinced the incident commander that he was 18 years old.

John's other pursuits

Bagpiper: While attending the local 49ers parade in 1958, John was enthralled by the parade bagpipers and said, "Someday I want to play the pipes." Encouraged by his father and the family's Irish heritage, that day happened in 1972. Financed by his smoke-jumper income, he purchased a set of bagpipes and quickly learned to play them. John became a regular at area funerals and memorials. His last engagement was at the Doug Houston Memorial in June 2022.

Cowboy poet: As a smokejumper and cowboy

"teller of tales," John easily gravitated to "cowboy poetry." He routinely performs at the Western Folklife Cowboys Poetry Gathering, sometimes with daughter and singer Meghan, who has a beautiful voice.

Cowboy-daughter duet:

In years past John and Meghan have performed together on PBS and on National Public Radio Irish-Americana documentaries.

Community supporter:

Community is very important to John. He staffs the local Christmas tree sales venue for 3-4 weeks every Christmas season. All proceeds go to the local Methow Valley Community Center.

John also makes the John Doran Ranch available for lo-

cal community 501 (c)(3) and other events. A few years ago, when the Forest Service was considering moving NCSB to Wenatchee or Yakima, the ranch hosted the NCSB "Save the Base" event – it was much appreciated!

John is recognized as an integral part of the Methow Valley, and his contribution to valley life deeply appreciated – a recognized "valley character."

Let's keep the flame burning

The NSA Mission Statement explains we are "*Keepers of the Flame.*"

John answered the call. 🔦



John Doran (NCSB-72)

Siskiyou Smokejumper Museum Docent
Traveling Smokerjumper Exhibit

Cowboy Poet • Bagpiper • Keeper of the Flame



Daughter Meghan & John



John Doran (NCSB-72)



Traveling Smokejumper Exhibit



John & July at his ranch

Layout Design: Johnny Kirkley (CJ-64)

So, What Goes On Inside A Smokejumper Aircraft?

by Dick Rath (Missoula '73)

One year back, shortly after learning of **Tim Hart's** (GAC-16) death, I sat down and wrote this story. It has been fifteen months since his passing, and I thought it was time to look back at his death and ponder some of the issues.

August 1973—It is mid-afternoon on a very hot August day. The fire siren just went off. Dispatcher **Charlie Rodgers** (MSO-64) is reading the names of the sixteen jumpers on the load. Your name is located halfway down the list, and you are part of the sixteen-man Doug load. As you begin suiting up in the heat of the tarmac and boarding the DC-3, you see two pilots begin the cadence of starting the engines. Once you have heard a DC-3's radial engines, you will never forget them. Their unique sounds brings back memories for decades.

On board you are seated toward the middle of the aircraft, sitting between the legs of the seventh man, your jump partner. It is hot in the aircraft, and you can't wait to get into the air where it will be cooler.

As you roll down the runway and become airborne, your thoughts change from the heat to the direction you are flying, which is southwest from Missoula. This load is headed to the Salmon River where two other DC-3s had departed to earlier in the afternoon.

The flight goes by quickly. You begin checking the snaps on your harness, then your Capewells. You open the flap on your reserve making sure that the pins are secure, doing all of the things that will not be necessary when you become a more experienced jumper. Now it does kill a few minutes of flight time. You begin to look around and see that you are the only Rookie on the load. One of the veteran jumpers had been hazing you, all in fun. He gets your attention, and you can make out him saying, "Well, rookie, you are finally going to jump a real fire." All this attention certainly has not calmed your nerves.

Although your movement is restricted by the other jumpers, you can see the column of smoke

coming up on the horizon. A bit of anxiety begins to form in your head. This is your first jump on a Salmon River gobbler, and you have heard stories from the veterans. They told you that you had better hit the jump spot, or you will end up several thousand feet below—possibly in the river and looking at a huge hike up the hill.

As the spotters direct the pilots in an orbit around the jump spot, you notice the parachutes from the other two loads scattered around near the spot.

The spotters begin throwing streamers and soon are disconnecting the strap across the door. The foreman and one squadleader are hooking up, then they leave the aircraft. You are looking through the windows as much as possible and see them both hit the spot. You sigh a bit of relief.

Two by two, the aircraft empties, and it is now your turn to hook up. By this time the anxiety is almost gone, and a simple calm comes across your body. As you step into the door, you know that you are close to the jump spot as the pilot begins to feather the port engine. You feel a slap on your leg. From the countless number of times in practice, you thrust yourself six inches up and thirty-six out, form a tight position, and let the aircraft do the rest of the work of opening your parachute.

Once airborne, you are on your own. You had a good exit and don't have any twists. The jump spot is on a ridge and, after orienting yourself to your jump partner's location, you find that things are looking pretty good. As you turn into the wind, you let the up-canyon winds lessen your impact, and soon you are on the ground. You thank the Good Lord for bringing you in safely and begin un-suiting. At this point, more of your buddies are coming in. One catches some air, and you see him sailing downwind to the river. As a new man, you have forgotten the anxiety, the stuffy smell of the aircraft, and begin to congratulate yourself on being such a good chute handler. Then again, you realize that you were just darn lucky to have even hit the spot.

The foreman and squadleaders gather everyone up, and you open a cargo box, take out the tools, some candy bars and jerky. Then off you go to fight the fire.

Let's scroll ahead forty-eight years. Things have changed in the past half century. The DC-3 is gone, replaced by the Sherpas. The parachutes are no longer round, but square. The D-bag system has been replaced by a drogue chute, and each jumper is required to pull the handle opening their main chute.

So, let's look at this hot August day. The siren goes off, and like the old man did 49 years before you, you are suiting up and walking slowly to the aircraft. On this hot August day at the Aerial Fire Depot, you are headed to the Salmon River.

The aircraft is hot, and you are happy to get off the ground. As you reach the fire, the spotters begin their work trying to locate a jump spot big enough to accommodate a square chute. Finding nothing near the fire, they select a spot several miles away.

As the strap in the door is taken off, you watch as two by two your colleagues leave the aircraft. Now it is your turn. As the aircraft heads on final, you ready yourself. A slap on the leg and you have left the aircraft. You pull your ripcord, and your chute opens. As you zero in on the jump spot, a gust of wind hits you and you correct your chute. This maneuver, so close to the ground, causes the chute to slip air, and you are headed for a hard landing. On the ground you realize that the impact has broken your left leg. One of your fellow jumpers is an EMT, and he begins a Demerol IV to ease your pain. The other jumpers stop by to wish you well before heading to the fire. You can tell that they are relieved it isn't them on the ground.

Several hours later, a Medevac helicopter arrives, and you are being flown to the hospital in Grangeville. Your break is severe, and you are life-flighted to Spokane. Today is the end of your Smokejumper career.

These two stories are nearly fifty years apart. The first is of an actual jump I experienced and the second a product of my own mind. It was easy to write the first scenario, which has been etched into my brain nearly 49 years.

As I thought about writing this piece, I conducted a bit of research. In the first 75 years of smoke-jumping, the USFS did not have a single fatality due to parachute failure. One of our colleagues died from a misroute of a static line, nothing attributed

to the parachute or the D-Bag system.

In June 2021, Tim Hart, a West Yellowstone jumper, passed away after being injured on a hard landing while jumping a fire on the Gila N.F. in New Mexico. His death is the fourth fatality since the agencies converted to using the square chute.

Billy Martin (LGD-79) was the first fatality on a training jump in 1991. **Dave Liston** (FBX-98) was killed in a training jump in 2000, and **Mark Urban** (NIFC-03) was killed in 2013 on a training jump.

As I think about those four deaths, I have some questions. Why would an agency touting safety at every junction, approve the use of a piece of equipment that can easily kill the user? Why hasn't the square chute been placed on hold, similar to the military, and find out what the real issues are? My guess is that time will tell. One of the life lessons that I always learned the hard way is that one will continue to repeat a lesson until it is fully learned. I hope that Tim Hart's death is that final lesson.

I am not a parachute expert, nor do I claim to be. What I am is a man who left the smokejumper organization forty-five years ago to move on to the forest and spent the rest of my career in Fire Management. As a Fire Management Officer, it was my job to get a set of firefighters to a fire, put the fire out, and come back home safely. That was my sole purpose. Over thirty-five years, I dodged more than a few bullets. In the early years, I probably dodged some that I didn't even know were being fired. In the later years, as the fire behavior became more complex, I became much more cautious with our firefighting personnel. I believe that I was just fortunate not to have experienced a significant firefighter injury or fatality during my career. For that I always figured I had the right person looking over my shoulder.

Last spring one of my grandchildren, who attends elementary school in Missoula, toured the Aerial Fire Depot. Later she told me that she had asked the Guide whether he knew her grandpa and Great Uncle. He said that he didn't recognize the names, but later she found both of our names in a glass case. She asked me, "Grandpa, so you and Great Uncle Tom used to jump out of airplanes into Forest Fires?" I could see by the look on her face, that she was thinking what kind of lunatic would take a job like that. I just told her that Tom and I were young and just looking for an adventure. We certainly found it at the Aerial Fire Depot. 🔦

1958: The Best Summer Ever

Part 1: Aurora Borealis

by Norm Pawlowski (Cave Junction '57)

The summer of 1958 was the greatest period of my entire life. It was my second season at Cave Junction, and I was gifted with 13 fire jumps that summer, which I believe still stands as a record for fire jumps out of Cave Junction in a single season. Those who jumped two bases in a season, such as early in Alaska or Silver City and then jumped Cave Junction, could get more for the year. It was my inclination to stick around the base on evenings and weekends, a practice that delivered a bunch of my fire jumps from the bottom of the jump list, while other jumpers were off drinking beer and chasing girls.

Another factor making this my best summer was clear skies, unusually warm, sunny weather with multiple, unexpected thunderstorms sneaking in off the ocean. Weather satellites didn't exist, and forecasting was as primitive as it had been for the past 100 years. If it didn't come in from over land, you couldn't see it coming. However, a district ranger on the Siskiyou N.F. boasted that he had an "old-timer" on a mountaintop lookout who could sense whenever a thunderstorm was sneaking in off the Pacific Ocean. This old-timer would wake up all the neighboring lookouts by telephone, and they would be ready to mark lightning strikes as soon as the storm hit. At least twice that summer, a thunderstorm snuck in before daybreak, and we were up jumping fires at the crack of dawn.

Booster crews were called in more than once that summer, although I cannot remember how many times booster crews were needed. That's because I was gone on fires every time a booster crew was imported.

The smokejumper base at Cave Junction had two crew houses and at least 30 jumpers. I do not recall a single radio in either crew house, as radios were vacuum tube and reception was terrible in our area. A TV signal didn't exist in that area, and I do not recall any jumper getting a newspaper. Looking out at the world from our little Cave Junction

window, here is what true global warming looked like that summer.

June 27, **Gid Newton** (CJ-55) needed to make a quick, overnight trip to Dallas, Oregon his home up north. There were no freeways in 1958, so this was going to be over five hours up and over five hours back, 250 miles each way over twisty two-lane roads. Gid asked me to ride with him and do some of the driving so we could get back by dawn Saturday. Gid, like myself, did not want to miss an unexpected fire call. We loved jumping out of airplanes and tromping through the forests.

After the sun went down on this trip, the entire sky was ablaze with aurora borealis (northern lights). The sky was phenomenal, spectacular, fantastic, unbelievable. This light show covered half the sky from east to west, as high as directly overhead, and included every color imaginable. Each side of the north sky had curtains, with a light show center stage that continued to change shapes and colors. I said to Gid, "The sky is a stage with curtains opened to the sides, and God is putting on a show in the center." It was both awe inspiring, and intimidating.

The next two nights, jumpers and the pilot would stand out on the CJ airstrip and watch the lightshow. This occurrence of aurora borealis continued for two more nights, but with decreasing intensity each succeeding night. Of course, less of the sky was ablaze when viewed from Cave Junction, 250 miles south of Dallas.

Years later, and after several courses in nuclear physics, I developed an intense interest in the cosmos. In my readings, I discovered an intensity versus time graph reporting a history of the solar wind. It reported that in late June 1958, the sun suddenly put out a burst of solar wind, almost 10 times that of the normal range, which peaked on June 27-28. That solar burst raised Hell with the earth, disrupting radio communications and creating other phenomena. This was, and still remains, the largest burst of solar wind during the history of humans

arduous ability to measure it. The late 1950s also saw multiple historical maxima in sunspot activity.

Solar storms made the sun slightly hotter that summer, a true case of global warming. It was a warm, beautiful summer. District Rangers used smokejumpers liberally, probably in a panic from several surprise thunderstorms. They called us immediately, keeping fires small. We had no project fires that I can recall, not on the forest covered by our Cave Junction base anyway. Many (most) of my fires were two-man. It was great for smokejumpers. Whatever global warming does for making fires burn hotter, it did not cause excess forests to burn because aggressive suppression was consistently applied.

It was a marvelous summer, (and profitable too, for smokejumpers anyway). At that time, and continuing to today too, I could not imagine falling into any better good fortune than being hired by Base Manager **Jim Allen** (NCSB-46). We lived in con-

stant optimism in that the phone could ring at any moment, calling us to a new and exciting adventure in one of thousands of beautiful locations, all the way from jungles of brush to high alpine meadows. I loved that job, every minute of every day. And, the summer of 1958, was my best summer, . . . ever. 🔦

Norm jumped at CJ 1957-61 and 1964. He earned his Ph.D. in Physical-Organic Chemistry from Oregon State University. He was an instructor at the University of Michigan, Professor at Illinois State University and Oregon State University, and Chemist and Regulatory Manager for Hewlett-Packard in Corvallis, Oregon. In retirement, he is a Christmas Tree Farmer and a longtime Basketball Official and Evaluator/Trainer of Basketball Officials. Might add that he was one of my trainers during my rookie season. I still remember him doing his pullups and bringing the bar behind his head. Haven't seen anyone else do that. (Ed.)

The Concept of Managed Wildfire

by Michael Rains (Associate)

In the October 2022 issue of *Smokejumper*, I thought the article by Robert Hirling, entitled “Forest Fires and National Defense Policy,” was especially informative and instructional. I believe much of his piece coincides quite closely with the document entitled, “America’s Forests in the Balance: A National Emergency [*A Call to Action*]” – a continuing text developed by 60 [and counting] professionals over the last three years. The section in *A Call to Action – The Concept of Managed Wildfire* is especially well-linked to Hirling’s contribution. Accordingly, it seems prudent to share *The Concept of Managed Wildfire* in the *Smokejumper*.

Managed wildfires are natu-

ral ignitions [some refer to them as “unplanned”] which under suitable weather and soil moisture conditions are allowed to burn to meet desired ecological objectives where pre-planned and approved in Forest Plans for the National Forests. This allows fire to play a natural role in restoring the ecosystems by recycling nutrients into the soil and clearing the forest floor of excessive debris. The key is to identify the right kind of fire at the right time and at the right place. However, relying on natural ignitions to instantly create an opportunity for a managed wildfire in a random location, without adequate planning and pre-positioning for resources, is “like playing a game of Russian Roulette,” as a very respected

colleague once concluded. This [*managed wildfire*] is not to be confused with “Prescribed Fire” which is conducted under very specific conditions.

Action item No. 2 on the list of “Top 10 Action” in *A Call to Action* calls for –without exception—the elimination of *managed wildfire* for the foreseeable future. The reality is that with the clogged-up conditions of our forests, it is hard to predict weather events, and with the extremely high level of expertise required to perfectly “herd” a wildfire, *managed wildfire* quickly becomes an escaped fire. Thus, for now, the notion of effectively directing a wildfire to help restore the forest has become largely an intellectual argument and puts others need-

lessly in harm's way and causes deaths due to smoke inhalation. It significantly increases fire suppression costs that continue to shift more funds away from badly needed traditional forest maintenance and the associated loss of critical habitat, wildlife, and soil stabilization from various plant growth.

Further, with the risks associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, the notion of letting fires burn to help accrue forest restoration targets is unconscionable. There is a strong connection between smoke inhalation and the more dire effects of Covid-19. In addition, coronavirus cases in the United States have recently surged with the spread of the highly transmissible variants.

Messages on *managed wildfire* are extremely mixed. On one hand, national direction from USDA Forest Service leaders seems to suggest no more *managed wildfire* due to current conditions. Events on the ground show a far different scenario. This misguidance may be due to available budgets and candidly, stale Forest Service research that promotes *managed wildfire* regardless of different times and conditions [read, promoting an intellectual narrative].

Please know that a steady flow of funding from fire suppression is being used to *manage wildfires* or in reality, attempt to manage a wildfire. The application of pre-approved and planned prescribed fire comes with a much more constrained budgetary account. Using an unplanned ignition as a de facto

prescribed fire and claiming land restoration credits is simply wrong. Perhaps an Office of Investigation [OIG] accounting of this practice is warranted.

As stated above, the practice of *managed wildfire*, especially in the western part of our country, is a huge gamble that can quickly accelerate to an "escaped fire." This has become all too common in recent years, regardless of good intentions. And, regardless of weather and all the other "fire factors," the practice of *managed wildfire* requires far too much knowledge and authority by the person making this immediate call; frankly, it's not a fair fight. There are simply too many factors at risk. The unpredictability of the fire and its destruction in this current time and place will always win.

The outcome of prescribed fire is much more predictable. In recent studies, prescribed fires have shown to be much safer and, if deployed carefully and under the right conditions, can significantly help reduce hazardous fuels. Increased appropriations by Congress for prescribed burning is a critical step in the right direction.

The concept of *managed wildfire* must be stopped, and the careful use of *prescribed fire* needs to be a key tool in a pragmatic forest maintenance regime. It is interesting to note that recently, an extremely well-respected former Forest Supervisor for the USDA Forest Service stated: "...If I were Chief, I would never allow *managed wildfires*; not this year, not EVER."

Or, as an anonymous Forest Service employee so clearly stated: "...I try to point out the fact that if you're not out conducting Rx fire [*prescribed fire*] right now, why in the hell do you think you could manage a fire for resource benefit[s]."

Managed wildfire seems to be, as many have suggested, an intellectual theory that should never be applied, while *prescribed fire* is a great tool that needs much more application and funding.

Here is the bottom line: *It is time to declare that all wildfires will be promptly and aggressively extinguished, period; no exceptions.* Extremely clear direction is a must. And this direction must be corporately followed. For example, the word "manage" means to handle or direct with a degree of skill: such as to exercise executive, administrative, and supervisory direction. To us, this means a very hands-on approach. Backing off to the "next best ridge", while perhaps workable, can hardly be called a "hands on approach."

On August 2, 2021, the newly appointed Forest Service Chief sent a letter to his leadership team regarding the use of managed wildfire. The key points of the letter: managing wildfire for resource benefits is a strategy we will not use. In addition, "...until further notice, ignited prescribed fire operations will be considered only in specific geographic areas and only with approval by the national office."

We must be diligent to ensure that clear direction is followed, and for the foreseeable

future, all wildfires are to be extinguished immediately, no exceptions. Unfortunately, it looks like the Chief's letter is *not* being corporately followed. Examples include the recent Tamarack, Dixie, and Caldor Fires in California. In fact, America's Chief Forester published a letter on December 20, 2021, that seems to reverse his position on August 2, 2021, regarding *managed fire*. Where we are now is so unclear. This is unfortunate. The American people deserve better.

Some have called me out on my current stance regarding *managed fire*. That's fair. In 2018, my colleague Tom Harbour and myself wrote an essay in "193 Million Acres: Toward a Healthier and More Resilient US Forest Service" entitled,

"Restoring Fire as a Landscape Conservation Tool: Nontraditional Thoughts for a Traditional Organization." From an intellectual point of view, I love this essay. But NOT NOW. These are different times. With the current land conditions and the impacts of a changing climate, the notion of allowing a fire to burn anywhere, for whatever reason, for the foreseeable future, is unacceptable and must be stopped now, no exceptions.

In my view, for now, a dominant Forest Service goal in 2023 and ahead should be to put out all unplanned wildfire ignitions within 24 hours, no exceptions. I beg you, please help make this a cornerstone of America's Chief Forester's annual Letter of Intent for the

next decade, at least. The credibility this stance will afford the USDA Forest Service, if corporately deployed, will be immeasurable. We believe the American people expect this on *their* lands. The current landscape conditions will not enable "managed fires" or "beneficial fires" or a "let it burn" policy. 🌲

Michael T. Rains, a retired Deputy Chief of the U.S. Forest Service. A widely respected leader in linking environmental health with community stability, Michael led a career that spanned nearly half a century with the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Forest Service. He rose through the ranks of the Forest Service to become a deputy chief after starting his career as a wildland forest firefighter in the '60s.

Smokejumper Training Thwarts Hijacking of Pan-Am Clipper 73—Jack Ridgway Story

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

This story was originally published in the July 2001 issue of "Smokejumper." Jack passed away in January 2021. I thought this event, and the part that Jack played, is unique in smokejumper history and needs to be read by the newer generation. (Ed.)

On September 5, 1986, Pan Am Clipper 73 was hijacked on the ground in Karachi, Pakistan. Nearly 400 passengers, ground crew, and flight attendants spent the next 16 hours as hostages of the gunmen. When the 747's alternate power system failed, the terrorists panicked and opened fire, leaving 21 dead—in-

cluding two Americans.

Among the flight crew was Flight Engineer **Jack Ridgway** (CJ-60). Even though the hijacking ended with the tragic loss of 21 lives, an even-greater tragedy was averted by the quick and decisive action of the cockpit crew led by Ridgway. The terrorists had eventually planned to destroy the plane, passengers, and themselves. Jack says that his smokejumper training 25 years earlier played an important part in his initiating an escape by the flight crew, using an untried escape procedure. The following paragraphs tell this story as recalled by Jack from his home in

NSA President Bob McKean recently sent this letter to Arizona Senator Kyrsten Sinema showing NSA support for improving pay and benefits for out wildland firefighters. (Ed.)

Dear Senator Sinema:

The National Smokejumper Association is a private, non-profit (501 [c][3]) organization dedicated to preserving the history and lore of smokejumping, maintaining, and restoring our nation's forest and rangeland resources, and responding to special needs of smokejumpers and their families. The NSA comprises 1,500 members, many of whom are retired from smokejumping; many moved on to a wide variety of other professions after smokejumping. Our reach is well beyond our 1,500 members through our various programs and especially our quarterly magazine, *Smokejumper*, which is widely read in the wildland firefighting community.

As you know, smokejumpers are federal first responders; both the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management have smokejumper programs. Their primary mission is to parachute to fires and put them out before they become large. Quite often, fires they jump are

in remote areas. There are nine smokejumper bases that serve the Rocky Mountain states, the Pacific Coast states, and Alaska.

Wildland firefighting is difficult, dangerous work! That is particularly the case since fire seasons are now much longer and conditions generally much drier as climate changes. Consequently, it is becoming increasingly difficult to attract and retain high-quality federal firefighters. That is particularly the case given that many leave the ranks for more lucrative positions in local fire municipalities.

Therefore, the National Smokejumper Association strongly supports the Tim Hart Wildland Firefighter Classification and Pay Parity Act.

Pay and benefits for federal wildland firefighters must be dramatically improved to be commensurate with their difficult, dangerous work. Improved pay and benefits are required for the federal government to attract and retain the highly skilled, professional workforce necessary in today's wildfire environment. Moreover, increasing the pay and benefits of federal wildland firefighters is simply the right thing to do!

West Dover, Vt., where he currently is a home builder.

Clipper 73 was scheduled to depart for Frankfurt in the morning hours of September 5. The crew had spent the night in Karachi and were going to the airport to start the pre-flight checks of the aircraft.

On the way to the airport, the captain asked Jack if he "heard machine gun fire last night." Political unrest was commonplace, and the airport was secured with uniformed armed guards surrounding the plane when the crew started the pre-flight at 3 a.m. As the crew was finishing pre-flight, a flight attendant came to Jack telling him that there was an armed man downstairs. There are no weapons for the crew other than small crash axes to be used to escape from the cockpit.

Ridgway grabbed the crash ax and proceeded down the spiral staircase, expecting to see a pas-

senger with a handgun. Instead, he saw a person in a full security officer uniform and an ID badge, armed with an automatic weapon. Due to the unstable political situation in Pakistan, Jack thought that this might be part of a takeover of the country by the military. There were four uniformed and armed men on the plane at this time.

The armed man had not seen Ridgway come down the staircase behind him. Operating under the premise that it was a military coup, Jack retreated quietly up the staircase to the flight deck where he opened one of the cockpit hatches to see if there were any vehicles and activity by the military. There was no activity on the ground outside the 747.

The cockpit of the 747 stood 32 feet off the ground and could be exited via a small escape hatch which was located just behind and above the captain's seat. There was an escape reel, which

was a tension device consisting of a rope attached to a handle. The person exiting the cockpit is supposed to squeeze through the hatch with the handle in hand and leap into space, trusting the escape reel to do its job and prevent a free-fall to the tarmac.

This procedure had been little talked-about and had not been part of any active training by the flight crew. As a matter of fact, it had never been tried at all. There were doubts by the captain and first officer about the advisability of even using this system.

Recalling his smokejumper training some 25 years earlier, Ridgway did not hesitate. He grabbed the handle and exited the cockpit. Jack recalled that the tension device “worked like a charm,” and deposited him on the tarmac some 32 feet below the cockpit. From the tarmac, Jack could see another gunman holding a stewardess at the door near the first-class section. Again, the gunman did not notice or hear Jack.

Ridgway then made his way to the operations office in the terminal. The pilot and copilot had not exited the aircraft at that time. The operations office couldn't contact the plane and had no idea what was going on. At the time, the most-logical possibility was a military takeover of the country by the Pakistani military. The operations people hid Jack in the ceiling as terminal activity increased. Shortly thereafter, the pilot and copilot followed Jack's actions and used the same escape method and made their way to the operations office.

During this time, it became evident that there was a hijacking in progress, and it was not a Pakistani military takeover. After securing the 747, the hijackers went up to the flight deck to finish securing the plane. They were surprised when the cockpit was completely empty of the flight crew. They immediately contacted the operations office and demanded a flight crew or they would start shooting a passenger every ten minutes. One person, an American, had already been killed in the early stages of the takeover.

The FBI arrived on the scene and took the flight crew to the American embassy. By this time some details were surfacing, and more were found out later. The hijackers were Palestinian terrorists armed in Libya. Their mission was to hijack the

plane, fly to Cyprus and exchange some of the passengers for Palestinian prisoners.

The most-prominent prisoners in Cyprus were three members of a Palestinian group called Force 17, who had been convicted in the murder of three Israelis in 1985. From there, it was to Beirut to drop off the prisoners and then to Tel Aviv, where the aircraft would be blown up in flight. The escape of the flight crew had thrown a big glitch into these plans.

The hijacking had been well-planned. The four hijackers approached the 747 dressed in Pakistani security uniforms with ID badges and riding in a vehicle with an emergency light flashing. They passed easily through security and rushed the gangway, shooting an employee.

Once aboard Flight 73, they started securing the aircraft and shot an American passenger, throwing him onto the tarmac. They left the securing of the flight deck until last. That, and Ridgway's immediate action, was the mistake that probably saved the rest of the passengers and crew.

Communications were established with the hijackers when mechanic Meherjee Kharas (who was later killed) opened the line with the cockpit. Negotiations had continued for 16 hours during which time the auxiliary power unit had been running. Officials knew that when the power unit shut down, all lights, air conditioning, and radio communication would be lost. It was only a matter of time before this happened.

When it did happen at about 10 p.m. local time, the nervous hijackers started shooting and threw at least two grenades. There were fatalities. More than 100 were injured, either from the shooting or from their escape from the aircraft, which stood high off the ground. All four of the hijackers survived and were taken as prisoners. A fifth terrorist was arrested two days later. All five were convicted and sentenced to hang after a trial in 1988.

Pakistani newspapers called the action a “daring commando action” by the Pakistani military. Later revelations questioned this headline. When the lights went off in the plane, the runway lights and other airport lights were turned off. The commandos gained control of the aircraft half an hour after the shooting began. They had to wait for a ladder to get into the plane and all the shooting

was done by that time. In the 1988 trial of the hijackers, the judge rejected a claim by the defendants that the Pakistani commandos had killed the hostages. Judge Mohammad Babar said the commandos were nowhere near entering the plane when the passengers were killed.

In the words of Pan-Am Vice-Chairman Martin Shugrue, every expert about hijacking counseled, “Negotiate; negotiate; negotiate. Buy time; buy time; buy time.”

The Stars and Stripes reported that a Delta team had been dispatched and were on the way to Karachi at the time “the lights went out.”

Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi of India sharply criticized Pakistan’s handling of the incident, saying, “I do not believe that fuel for the power unit just ran out. It was a deliberate action to enter the aircraft. Unfortunately, it was bungled and caused

the deaths of a number of people.”

After reading many newspaper articles and documents provided by Jack, it is evident that the hijackers had planned to end this operation with the destruction of the 747 and all who remained on it. The factor in thwarting this outcome was the escape of the flight crew. The key to their escape was the quick action by Jack Ridgway who didn’t hesitate to put into action a technique similar to his smokejumper letdown training 25 years earlier in his life. 🕯

Jack Ridgway completed Navy Flight School in Pensacola, Florida, after three years at Villanova University and one year at San Francisco State University. He flew Sikorsky H-34’s for three years in the U.S. Marine Corps including a year in Vietnam. Jack was a pilot/flight engineer/navigator for 14 years with Pam Am.

Mark Corbet

A remarkable human being, great smokejumper, and just “a real nice guy!”

by **Bill Moody** (North Cascades ’57)

Whatever your image is of “the quintessential stud smokejumper,” my personification of the quintessential jumper is a 5’7”, 165-pound ranch kid from Diamond, Oregon—Mark Corbet. During his 31 years of smokejumping, making 305 fire jumps, Mark proved to be one of the most highly respected smokejumpers in the smokejumper program. Unless you really got to know him, perhaps as a fellow La Grande or Redmond jumper, his talents were often hidden by his humble and quiet nature.

As the NCSB Base Manager who hosted “Mark’s booster crews” from La Grande and Redmond, I had the highest respect for Mark—his profes-

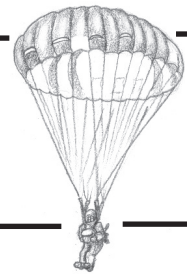
sionalism and competence in conducting the smokejumper mission, always taking initiative and willing to help wherever he could. His solution to problems was always well thought out.

Not only was Mark a great jumper, but he also had a passion for smokejumper history. Most notable was his research regarding the first smokejumper fire-related fatality—Malvin Brown, of the 555th Infantry Battalion, in 1945 on the Umpqua National Forest. More recently he authored the book “*Between the Dragon and His Wrath*.” Mark was in the process of authoring a book on the history of the La Grande Smokejumper Base.

When I think of Mark, I

reflect on his spirit and perseverance to overcome his chronic health issue—the pituitary tumor and related operations. Upon hearing about Mark’s medical issue, I thought “Mark will never jump again.” Mark proved us wrong. His love for smokejumping, his personal grit, dedication to a recovery regimen, and “the challenge” carried him to recovery and “back on the list”! I truly admired Mark. He put his head down and overcame a major life challenge. Mark Corbet—the quintessential smokejumper, and much more. “Just a real nice guy.” 🕯

Mark died November 6, 2021. (Ed.)



ODDS AND ENDS

Chuck Sheley (Cave Junction '59) Congratulations and thanks to **Nathan Yost** (IDC-54), **Mark Duffey** (WYS-98), **Tom Vanderhoof** (Assoc.), **Bob Burns** (Assoc.) and **Daren Belsby** (NCSB-86) who just became our latest Life Members.

From **Merv George** (Forest Supv. Siskiyou/Rogue N.F.) and **Dan Quinones** (RAC-02) (Forest FMO) Oct. 4, 2022: "As of this morning, we are at 71 fires for **19.84 acres this year**. 39 were lightning and 32 were human caused, all of which received an immediate suppression response from our local resources as well as the additional assets we have **pre-positioned** across the forest. This does not include the multiple fires we have supported on adjacent lands with both ground and aviation resources to help keep all fires small within SW Oregon. Our partners have also assisted us on our fires as we all have taken a close-forces concept to responding to new starts and sorting out jurisdiction as time allows".

(We in Northern California are hoping that some miracle will happen, and we will get Forest Supervisors with Merv's and Dan's "can do attitude." Unfortunately, not a chance. Ed.)

Phil Collins (RDD-59) remembering **Dave Nelson** (MSO-57): "In June of 1959, I met Dave Nelson in the Smokejumper Loft in Redding. Dave and I jumped several fires together, and I remember one well. One morning, after a severe lightning storm, two of us jumped a fire in Yosemite. We both made our landings in tall Red Fir because there wasn't much choice. The fire was burning high in the crown, and the tree needed to be cut down. The tree was about six and a half feet, and our misery whip was six feet.

"We started about 11:00 a.m. and, after some time, it became necessary to remove one of the saw handles, and it became a one-person show. Unnoticed, the can of saw lubricant fell over and was lost. A saw without lubricant doesn't slide



very well through a Red Fir. Finally, about 12 hours later, the tree began to crack and fell."

Charlene Olivares: "Today my husband and I visited the West Yellowstone Fire Center. We were treated to a tour by two wonderful young smokejumpers. We had the best time. I was overjoyed to see my father on the picture wall from 1953. It brought me to tears. I didn't appreciate all this information when my dad was alive, and I'm overjoyed to see it as an adult. I just wanted you all to know how much being there meant to me. My dad's name is **Charles 'Chuck' Viviano** (WYS-53). He and my mom met in West Yellowstone in 1953. He eventually became a fire fighter in Los Angeles LAFD, and retired in 1990 as a Fire Captain. I was always so proud of him and all his accomplishments."

Fred Cooper (NCSB-62): "I just saw **Jan Van Wagtendonk's** (CJ-60) obit. In 1962, another guy and I saved him from drowning at the Annual Oregon State Forestry Day's celebration. In a glory jump, he parachuted into the middle of a lake at the celebration and his Mae West failed to inflate. After it looked like he was in trouble, another guy and I grabbed the only rowboat on shore and rowed out to him. I was able to grab a little bit of the nylon that was still on the surface and pulled until he surfaced. A nurse swam out to meet us and she gave him mouth to mouth while I held him on the outside edge of the rowboat until we got to shore and the medics on site brought him back to life. Jan, **Lynn Sprague** (MYC-59), and I were in the OSU Skydiving Club."

Kevin Hodgins (Rdd-67): "The person who said there was no excuse for the fires to be as large as they are, is correct. They let the Mendocino burn to the Yolla Bolla where the Six Rivers N.F. let a fire burn for two weeks. When they met, one flank went to Zenia (where I live). When the fire

was slowing down, the FS burned out a road. It jumped Ruth Lake and came by my place. The fire burned my shop and headed for fire camp. They burned out around the fire camp and burned down three houses with crews sitting in fire camp. They also burned out behind my house which took out my neighbor's barn.

"I asked the FS if they were going to put out the fire or burn the world down. He said we no longer put out fires, we 'manage' them. They managed to burn down a lot of houses—even his own."

Tom Decker (IDC-64): "I receive *The Lutheran Forum*, a quarterly journal, which is good and serves the purpose for most Lutheran pastors. It annually wins awards in one of several catego-

ries. I also receive the journal for the Army War College. I'd pick *Smokejumper* over it any day. I think that *Smokejumper* is a prize winner but don't know if it ever receives outside recognition for its excellence."

Bill Moody (NCSB-57): "**John Doran** (NCSB-72) set up and staffed the smokejumper traveling display at our Okanogan County Fair Sept. 9-11.

Best display site at the fair—said lots of visitors."

Roger Thomas (MSO-65): In relation to GSF donation in honor of **Chuck Lockwood** (MSO-65)—"I want to make this donation in honor of Chuck Lockwood. I was in the 1966 auto accident that disabled Chuck. I was in the vehicle's back seat with Chuck when it rolled." 🦉

FEEDBACK FROM THE 2022 BOISE REUNION

Denny Breslin (NCSB-69): Thanks to all, particularly the planning committee and volunteers. So much work - and it was appreciated by all. Just walking around and listening to conversations between jumpers and their families was a testament to the respect and appreciation non-jumpers had for family members who jumped. Sometimes I don't think family members who were not part of our jumping lives, "back then," realize what an important part of our life it was. The reunion surely helped them understand.

Mike Bina (MSO-68): I was impressed with the diversity of the jumper crowd and the success everyone had in their lives in terms of careers and their families. And in spite of all that success, I never heard anyone crowing about it. Kind of like when we did our jobs as smokejumpers contributing to the success of the mission as a team and not individual success.

Jim Cherry (MSO-57): It was so deeply renewing to have been with all of you. I look forward to the next time—God willing, and the creek don't rise. The start of a good day means you keep waking up on the topside of the grass, not at room temperature, and do your best to get vertical. Have a good day, all of you. As it was said at the Sunday remembrance, "Don't let the old man in"

Jim Frakes (RDD-65): All in all, the facility was good (all of us together), good sponsors, displays, great food. Like you said, have another re-union, skip the displays/sales, etc. Just have a get-together, swap stories/lies and good old smokejumper fellowship.

John Crues (MSO-70): It was a fantastic event!

Don Baker (MSO-65): The Reunion was a wonderful event. The only complaint I had was the type on the name tags for each of us was so small that you needed a magnifying glass to read the Jumper's name!

Troop Emonds (CJ-66): This Boise 2022 Smokejumper Reunion was the greatest of all gatherings. Met guys haven't seen in 30 to 40 years and met Legends from our folklore culture who we have all heard about.

Was particularly pleased that my old base foreman and mentor, the great Chuck Sheley, was recognized for his great and selfless leadership in saving smokejumper history, editing the magazine, and the enormous task of explaining the true history of this unique culture that most Americans know nothing about. Mostly you blatantly attempt to share the unique characters of those who made up

the song and daring spirit of those great Americans, only 6,000 strong, in our history who wagered with the wind to crash into rocks, tall snags, rivers, and

the unknown dangers to deal with the dragon of forests. What a great gathering of spectacular characters. So proud to be a part of such group.

Thanks to the Boise Reunion Committee & Our Sponsors

Reunion Committee

Leo Cromwell, Bill Fogg, Bill Harro, Guy Hurlbutt, Jim Lancaster, Charlotte Larson, Francis Mohr, Lynn Sprague, Jim Swartley, Austin Young.

Reunion Partners

National Interagency Fire Center, Idaho City Historic Foundation, Linda Bass, Linda Hurlbutt, Teresa Ceniga.

Fly Rod Raffle

Lynn Sprague, Guy Hurlbutt, Anglers Fly Shop

Reunion Sponsors

Perimeter Solutions, 10 Tanker Air Carrier, Cascade Raft and Kayak, Stein Distributing, Alpine Construction.



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Pat Durland (MYC-75): It was great connecting with old friends (I was impressed, despite everyone aging over the years, how I have been able to stay so young! Ha-ha!) and meeting new ones! Too long since we have been able to do that, so looking forward to more reunions and receptions in the future. Sad to say it seems that “fewer folks is wiser these days.”

Great job by Lynn’s (Sprague) team planning and making it happen. I’m guessing at the next one the registration instructions may include, “NO late registrations!” That was an unforeseen issue that created difficulties. I’ve seen that restriction on other events and now I know why. I’m hoping that “Barney’s,” aka Austin, blood pressure has returned to a manageable level!

Jeff McCune (MYC-77): It was an excellent event at a very nice venue and accommodations. The only improvement I might suggest is much larger print size on the name tags! I saw a lot of old guys bending over and squinting to see our names and bases and years, and then in many cases still having to ask what the name tags said. We might want to “keep the old man away” but still, larger print would help. I hope we do get back on track for 2024 and there is no Covid 29 or such.

Toby Scott (MYC-57): Looks like I missed a good one. Been down with Covid. Really knocked my old Dick in the dirt.

Brooks Henderson (RDD-69): The best program of any National Reunion, and I have attended all or at least 84 on. Great reunion, especially having it at large hotel. The MC was great, need to ensure all speakers can be heard by all. Thought NSA President went on a tad long, but good presentation. Sunday, the two guys who MCed were great, subject was very timely and worthwhile, but personally the two guests were of limited value. I would have liked to have base-by-base gatherings scheduled Friday, just a location to make contact.

Bob Reid (MSO-57): Great reunion, but too bad we didn’t have someone video recording “war stories” from the older guys. Riverside facilities were outstanding. Was great chatting with guys

I last saw some sixty years ago, but that’s likely last time I travel by car across America! Bottom line- while we didn’t have time to participate in planned activities away from hotel, just reminiscing with these old guys made the trip more than worthwhile.

Gary R. “Gramps” Johnson (RDD-69): I’m really glad I went to the reunion this year (almost didn’t). Everything was great and our reunion committee deserves a real pat on the back. Also, I want to single out the Sunday morning memorial. Having attended a number of these activities in the past, I think what was done with Bill and Gary discussing their life and how it interacted with their Smokejumper career was a highlight.

Mike Bina (MSO-68): Lynn Sprague, Austin, Guy, and others on the local organizing committee did a typical Smokejumper job. Well Done! I know that Chuck Sheley was very involved as well. I have organized conferences before and know of all the moving part—hotel, meals, audio-visual, buses, programs, registration, etc. Judging from comments of those who attended, clearly it was a wonderful experience. I never heard one complaint and that is amazing. Well done all around.

Dennis Weaver (IDC-64): I had a great time, met and shared stories with many Idaho City Jumpers that jumped before and after me. Idaho City trip was wonderful. I was very impressed with how organized it was. Thanks to all who made it possible. The food was great, and accommodations were great. Good job Chuck. Look forward to the Smokejumper Mag. each time it comes. Loved all the speakers, keep up the good work you do and congrats on your award again.

Dick Williamson (RDD-67): It was evident that whoever planned this event put a lot of time and effort into it. The location/hotel was excellent. The Saturday night speeches were fairly short and didn’t drag on. Both my wife and I were very impressed with the Sunday Program. It started with a delicious buffet breakfast, and the speakers provided a unique and professional presentation on aging and “The Tapestry.” The only thing I

found that could be improved would be to make the lettering on the name tags larger.

Jim Kitchen (FBX-87): I was at the reunion in Boise. The first one I have ever attended. It was so much fun. We laughed and smiled so much that my face hurt by the end of the weekend. I am recruiting jumpers I know to sign up for the next reunion! It exceeded all expectations I had.

Carl Gidlund (MSO-58): Thoroughly enjoyed the occasion and catching up with many old friends. The green sheet with the recent deaths is much appreciated. I was unaware of the passing of several. Many thanks.

Perry Whittaker (MSO-71): Thanks so much for all the hard work you and the organization committee did to have this reunion. I have only positive comments and don't know of anyone that had concerns.

Bruce Jackson (RAC-69): My wife and I were excited to get signed up for the National Smokejumper Reunion having attended all those going back to 1984 in Missoula. Kudos to the committee for the terrific job they did in terms of planning, organization, and the mountain of logistical support it required. The base group photos were a good example. They were well organized and announced. I watched in admiration as that team must have practiced herding cats in order to get a bunch of jumpers with dynamic personalities all engaged in various depths and volumes of conversation lined up for the camera. The guy running the shutter knew just when to pull the trigger that resulted in uniformly excellent group photos. The thumb drives distributed with all the base groups was frosting on the cake. The Riverside staff was very pleasant and professional, the food was excellent, and the atmosphere that prevailed overall was one of close camaraderie and a sense of joy in connecting again with old friends and making new ones. Of all the excellent speakers at the Saturday evening banquet, the one that delivered the most meaningful and memorable remarks for us was Jim Cherry. His invocation and prayer held that very large and robust group in rapt silence with its depth, directness, and the

spiritual resonance of what being smokejumpers translated to in our life's journey. We were blessed by his words.

Dale Graff (MSO-60): Really great reunion and at a beautiful facility. The ex-governor did a passable job. I was pleased recognition was given to Rod Snider (NCSB-51) the helicopter pilot from Higgins Ridge Fire.

Bob James (MSO-75): The reunion was great! As with most reunions of this size, getting around to see everybody you want to see can be tough. That is not a flaw of any kind, it's just what happens in a large attendance. Those of us who attend the reunions are very thankful for you and all of the others who put these together. Like Bob McKean said, "Not a day goes by when I don't think of my Smokejumper years." I really miss those days.

Cynthia (RAC-87)/**Scott Lusk** (FBX-81): We went to the reunion in Boise and had a Blast! I'd like to renew our NSA membership. Thank you to all who put on the reunion. It was awesome!

Frank Solf (MSO-67): Loved it! Great job!

Jim Cherry (MSO-57): The reunion was very enjoyable on several fronts. First, my son was able to accompany me. It gave us some quality father/son time together and, at the same time, gave him a window into a part of my life that has made so much of an impact and made me who I am today. Second, I enjoyed watching and listening to jumpers from so many different eras. I was struck by the way each march to the beat of their own drum—as individuals, as rookie groups, by jump bases, by eras in smokejumper history—and yet there is a common drumbeat that we all march to through our shared experiences that pulls us together into a "band of brothers." Thanks to all those who made the reunion possible and thanks to all who believed investing their time and effort would make it worth attending.

Don Stenberg (BOI-74): Chuck—Congratulations on the award you received at the Boise Reunion—well deserved. It was a good reunion. I was hoping to see some that were not there. 🕯



NSA Scholarships 2022

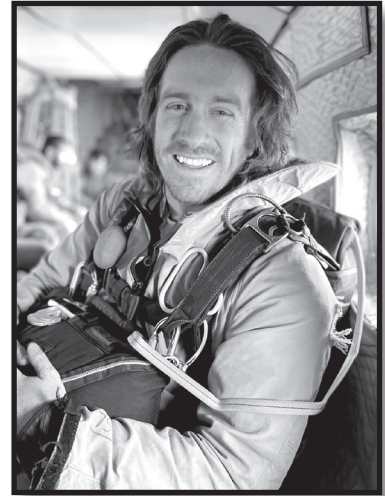
Photos Courtesy Recipients



Shyla Stevenson



Chloe Stoops



Brian Anderson



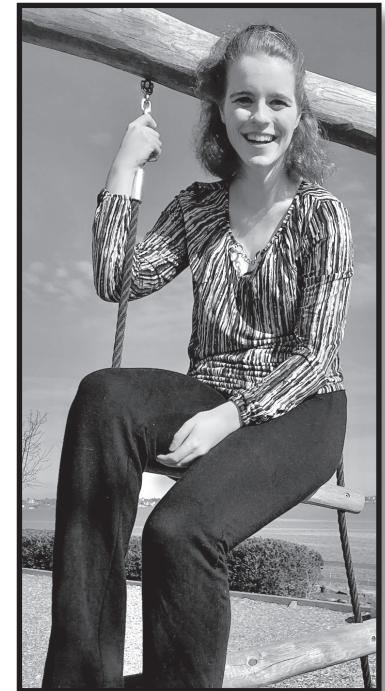
Elizabeth Odell



Kevin Norton



Matt Wideman



Linnea Leist

Layout Design: Johnny Kirkley (CJ-64)

INTRODUCING YOU TO THE 2022 NSA SCHOLARSHIP AWARDEES

The NSA Scholarship Committee, **Jim Cherry** (MSO-57), **Larry Lufkin** (CJ-63), **Mike Bina** (MSO-68), and **Charlotte Larson** (Smokejumper Pilot), is pleased to introduce the seven awardees of the 2022 NSA Scholarships. This program is fulfilling part of the NSA's mission "... *by responding to special needs of smokejumpers and their families.*" These scholarships are made possible through the generous donations of our members to whom we shout out our profound thanks. Hear the awardees appreciation and aspirations in their own words.

Brian Anderson: I would like to thank the National Smokejumper Association for awarding me the 2022 scholarship. It will facilitate me finishing my master's degree in fire ecology through the University of Idaho in fire ecology. It is my hope that this education will allow me to continue my career in fire management and help formulate solutions to the catastrophic wildfire issues we have in the western U.S. I would hope I have a few more good years of jumping before I must jockey a desk, however!

Chloe Stoops: I cannot thank you enough for selecting me for the NSA 2022 Scholarship. I am a sophomore in the Honors College at Arizona State University, studying Aerospace Engineering with a focus in Astronautics. I've also enjoyed participating in Rocketry club, Engineering Projects in Community Service, intramural sports, and more. This scholarship means a great deal to me, especially as it will allow me to focus on my studies, as well as pursue internship and research opportunities without worrying as much about my finances. Having grown up hearing my grandfather tell stories about his days as a Naval Captain and aviator, I have always had a passion for flight and for space and am fascinated by the math and technology that gets us there. My dream is to one day work for NASA, designing and creating devices to further explore our incredible universe. I am so grate-

ful for all that the NSA does, as well as for this scholarship and the many opportunities it will enable me to pursue.

Shyla Stevenson: I was born and raised in Libby, Montana, and I now reside in Missoula, Montana, where I attend Montana State University on the Missoula campus. I was qualified to apply for this scholarship because both my father (class of '89) and grandfather (class of '55) were Missoula Smokejumpers. After graduating high school, I worked for the Forest Service on various fire/fuels crews for six seasons before I decided to leave in pursuit of a career in nursing. I will graduate with a Bachelor of Science in Nursing in May 2024. Thank you, NSA members, for providing me with the funds to pursue my educational goals. This scholarship will allow me to put more energy into my nursing studies. I could not be more excited.

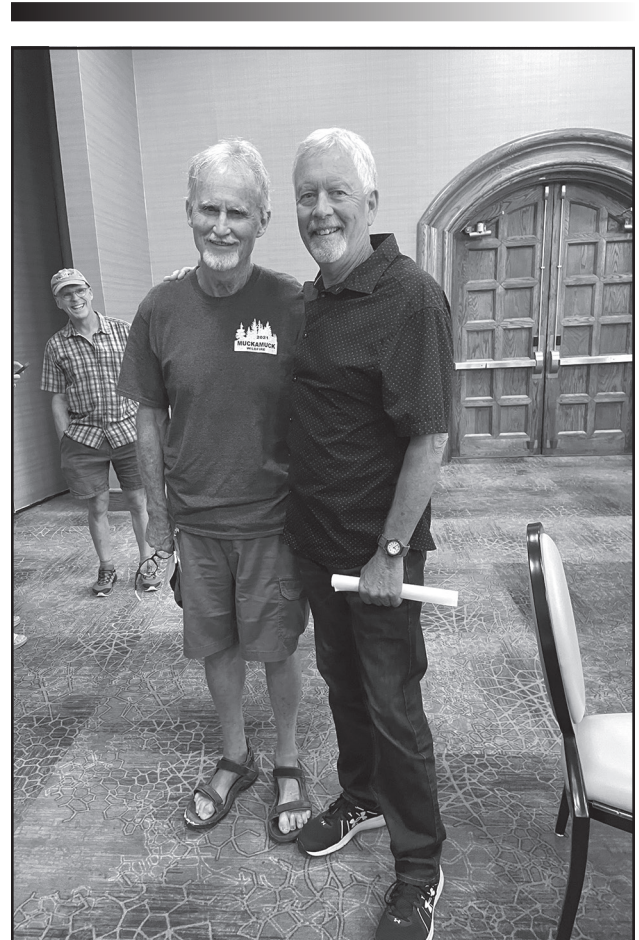
Matthew Wideman: I am both honored and grateful to receive one of the NSA scholarships for the 2022-23 school year. The continued support from the smokejumper community has been incredible as I progress along my journey. This scholarship will help me immensely, but there has been so much more. No other organization continues to both root on and cheer for former members like the bros do, and for that I have nothing but the deepest appreciation. Every one of the jumpers I have met only wants to see each other succeed, and it is a truly inspiring group to be a part of. This scholarship will help me get through the last year of my Master of Business Administration coursework at Boise State University. The whole of last year I used smokejumping money earned from the 2021 fire season, but as we all know, those funds only last so long as a student. This scholarship will allow me to pursue a graduate certificate in econometrics as well as my MBA instead of using class time trying to make ends meet throughout the school year. I believe I will be in a better place coming out of

school with this scholarship as it allows me to pursue additional courses to become a more well-rounded individual.

Linnea Leist: I write this letter with deep gratitude. Upon discovering that I had been selected as a recipient, I was overjoyed and relieved. This scholarship will ease some of the financial strain of tuition, textbooks, and daily educational life. This extra financial support will allow me to further extend my educational practice. I will be able to further fulfill my natural curiosity. As a student teacher, any extra funds will allow me the opportunity to purchase school supplies or resources to support my student teaching learning experience. I honestly cannot begin to express how grateful I am to have been selected as a recipient of this scholarship. The demanding work and dedication of the National Smokejumper Association never ceases to amaze me. I am not only grateful for the work you do to support students and their academic endeavors, but also your willingness to support our local communities. I conclude this letter with my sincerest thanks and gratitude! It is the sparks of human kindness and willingness to help that ignite the fire of success, passion, and willingness to help. You, The National Smokejumper Association, are one of those key sparks.

Elizabeth Odell: I am honored to be selected as a 2022 NSA scholarship recipient and am appreciative of the support. This fall I began my Junior year at California Polytechnic University, Humboldt. I am majoring in Environmental Resources Engineering, with a minor in Spanish. I also am on the NCAA Varsity Women's Triathlon Team, which is starting its very first season at Cal Poly Humboldt. Although I work as a bike mechanic at a local shop, last year I also worked for a campus research center on a project working to help the local rural communities reduce the effects of wildfires on those communities. This last summer I worked at Colorado School of Mines in Golden, Colorado, on a research project to create a concrete-like material from mine tailings. Once I graduate, I hope to use my degree to help improve the sustainability of the world.

Kevin Norton: I am honored to have been selected as a recipient of the 2022 National Smokejumper Association Scholarship. This generous gift will help reduce the financial burden of attending Oregon State University as I pursue higher education credits that will help me qualify for 401 Series fire management positions in the future. I have worked for the Great Basin Smokejumpers since 2015 and have been a wildland firefighter since 2006. As I approach the end of my 17th fire season, I have become more interested in a fire management career path and have recognized the need to acquire the prerequisites necessary to qualify for these positions. Additionally, the Natural Resources courses I have taken so far have helped me gain a better understanding of fire management and natural resources policy as pertains to wildland fire. 🔦



2022 Boise Reunion L-R: Gary "Gramps" Johnson, Gary "Pops" Johnson (Courtesy Diane Johnson)tfp

Was He Flirting With You?

by Mike Bina (Missoula '68)

When I returned from the National Smokejumper Association Reunion in Boise, I gave my wife, Mary, a reunion T-shirt. She loved it, put it on, and had to run to the grocery store. At the checkout counter, a guy behind her in line asked, "Are you a smokejumper?" Note, he didn't ask if she "was" a former smokejumper but asked "are" you a current one, present tense. Mary, a spry 73-year-old, was surprised, but proud that someone would "accuse" her of being one, and that she looked like she could have qualified being and was actually one.

That night before dinner, we were enjoying a happy hour libation. I started thinking about her grocery store encounter. I asked, "So was the guy in the grocery store interested in smokejumping or was he more interested in the person wearing the smokejumper T-shirt with parachutes on the back? Was he flirting with you? You know what I mean...."

Mary smiled and said, "It could be both." Then she started blushing. She continued, "Yeah, with my smokejumper T-shirt on, he was definitely flirting. Absolutely." We had a good laugh and changed the subject. 🦋



(Courtesy M. Bina)

The Look

by Ron Roberts (North Cascades '57)

Francis Lufkin was a man who never talked very much. He would say what needed to be said and that was it. Quite often his "look" was all that was needed.

In the summer of 1958, **Gene Jessup** (NCSB-57) and I were sent to the far end of the runway to take down some aspens that were starting to become a problem on landings and takeoffs. The end of the runway dropped off about 50 feet into a pool of water that was seepage from the river. The aspens were alongside the pool.

It was in the 90s and very hot. I made the mistake of letting Jessup use the chain saw, and some of the trees fell into the pool. We had to strip down

and pull the trees from the pool. I was doing the work of two as Gene spent most of the time splashing around, whooping, and spitting water in the air. Then I noticed the outline of a man standing on the edge of the runway. Although the sun was in my eyes, I knew it was Francis from the stag of his pants and the way he stood with his hands on his hips.

I'm sure he walked down to check on Gene who was always on probation. I tried to get Gene's attention as he splashed around but it was no use. When I looked up again, Francis was gone. Nothing was ever said but we knew on that day we had gotten the "Look." 🦋

The Salmon River Devil Winds

by Roger Cox (Missoula' 69)

I wish I could take credit for coining the phrase “devil winds,” but I must give that credit to **Bernie Hilde** (MSO-69). I first heard it on the Gila when Bernie was standing in the landing area, and I was several hundred feet high setting up for a roll in front of him. As I descended, the winds picked up overriding the forward speed of my T-10 and depositing me some 50 feet up in a ponderosa pine. He said it was the work of the “devil winds” that lay in wait for any jumper who thinks he has his preferred landing area nailed. Never discount the evil of the “Devil Winds.”

August 16, 1972, started out as a routine day on anything but a routine year. I had broken my ankle on my 61st jump on the Gila one month earlier. I got back on the list and already had three more jumps. I would finish the season with 29 jumps. Grangeville gave access to the Nez Perce N.F. including the north side of the Salmon River. The Nez Perce had some of the best fire assignments, but the Salmon River has the reputation of some of the most challenging jump areas in the nation. A call for a “16-manner to the Salmon” always was greeted with apprehension. Too many stories of large fires, poison ivy, and hot windy jumps are told about the Salmon River.

The request came in at 1545, heat-of-the-day conditions when the winds are usually the most challenging. When a request is made for jumpers, we know very little about the fire location and jump conditions. But we can speculate based on past experiences. On a heat-of-the-day request on the north rim of the Salmon River, hope for the best but expect the worst. The request was for several small fires in an area near Rabbit Point. It was an area known well. I had already jumped several fires in that area and there was room for cautious optimism.

We quickly suited up and boarded the Otter for a quick flight to Rabbit Point overlooking the Salmon River. **Phill Pittman** (MSO-64) was the spotter and familiar with the jump conditions on the river. His experience would get us in, if

possible. The request was for several fires, and we dropped jumpers two at time in the general area of Rabbit Point. Obviously, a thunderstorm had passed thru creating multiple small fires. The fires were mostly on the rim and still small, none required more than two jumpers.

Being the last jumpers on board, it was our turn, and as we circled the fire sizing up the situation, the jump seemed to be uneventful. My jump partner was **Joey Graham** (MSO-71). I had jumped with Joey before and knew him to be competent in his second season of jumping.

We could land close to the fire which was a lightning strike in scattered timber on the rim. The Salmon River was about a half mile away and probably some 3000 feet lower. The canyon wall was very steep with scattered ponderosa all the way to the bottom. All is well if fire does not burn over the rim and roll to the river. That appeared to be the only major concern.

Phil, after several sets of streamers, determined we could probably land just above the fire and on relatively flat terrain. I had watched the streamers with suspicion for I did not like jumping so close to the canyon rim. A wind change and you could find yourself 4000 feet above the river with no good options.

I jumped first and the chute opened normally. It appeared to be a routine descent into the determined jump spot. This was my 64th jump, enough time under a canopy to be suspicious of the conditions. I loved the ride but was always concerned until I hit the ground. Standard procedure for the drop is once “Jumpers Away” is sounded, the aircraft will turn to the left and maintain or drop in altitude to monitor the jumpers to the ground. It was also routine for the jumpers to see the aircraft as it circled them. The Otter came by us as usual, but we were above it. The alarms went off for me for I realized that the wind was blowing up the canyon and up the canyon walls creating what we called “up air.” I don’t like up air for it takes you places you do not want to go. The longer you

stay in the air, the more opportunity there is for disaster. My T-10 had good forward speed and turning performance, but that does not mean you can override a strong wind.

I yelled to Joey that I was steering further downwind to escape the “devil winds” and turned away from the canyon. I found a reasonable spot several hundred yards from the rim and landed safely among scattered large fir and ponderosa. As I was stripping off my jump suit, I could still see Joey drifting above the trees over the rim being held by those “devil winds.” I immediately gathered my personal gear bag, put my radio on my belt, and departed on a run for the fire and my jump partner.

Joey was out of sight by the time I arrived in the area. I soon found him hung up on the side of a large Douglas fir very near the edge of the canyon. A letdown from his position should not be a problem. The steepness of the ground put him 15 to 20 feet above me and maybe 30 feet above the ground. The vegetation was heavy just below him, but the ground was bare where it dropped steeply into the canyon. Being hung up on the side of the tree meant he might not be secure. Some of the lines were loose and hanging over and around him. He first had to clear these before he could begin a letdown. As he was clearing his lines, the chute started to tear out of the tree. It dropped him a few feet, held for a few seconds, dropped another 10 feet or so and hung momentarily. The reaction to the second pause caused Joey to bounce with his feet going head high. Then the chute completely tore free, and Joey hit the ground back first. He never had a chance to protect himself or stop the fall.

When Joey hit the ground, he immediately tumbled over the rim dragging his chute behind him. As the chute trailed by, I grabbed the apex. As I caught the apex with my left hand, I grabbed a Douglas fir limb with my right hand. I held. I shouted at Joey, but he did not respond. He apparently was unconscious. I did not have all his weight, but I did have enough that I could not let go of the limb. I was in trouble; we were in trouble.

The otter was circling waiting for our OK to drop the cargo. My radio was on my belt. I couldn't let go with either hand and reach my radio. So, I stood there with a parachute apex over

my arm, a tree limb holding me to the mountain with my jump partner unconscious twenty feet below me, and it was getting dark.

Unless Joey regained consciousness, whatever happened next was up to me. It was obvious that I had to make something happen. I could not stay in this position until someone finally decides something is wrong and checks on us. I realized that I had a hold of the apex. If I could work my hand through the opening, maybe I could reach my radio. With some effort, I worked my hand through the opening until I was able to slide the lines down my arm to the elbow. Now the lines were looped over my arm, freeing my left hand. I was able to grab the limb with that hand freeing my right hand to operate the radio.

I contacted the otter and explained my dilemma. Phil was able to drop the first aid supplies and a chain saw but could not help us beyond that. The otter had no more jumpers and Grangeville was jumped out. But there was another fire dropped about 2.5 miles downstream from us. Two jumpers were on that fire. Bernie Hilde was the jumper in charge. Bernie also had a radio and had been monitoring my report and call for assistance. I didn't have to ask. They were already heading for my position.

While standing helplessly with Joey below me, I could see another Region 4 aircraft traveling across the river. I recognized it as the McCall

Still Looking for Your Biography

The response has been good for the bio request. I've got close to 1,500 done. If you have not taken the time to send me one, please sit down and do so. Information in this order:

Born: Month, day, year, city, state. **Grew Up:** City, state, graduated from H.S. including location. **Further Education:** Location, degree(s). **Career:** Chronological order **Military service/Honors/Awards?**

Your Life: Have been getting good extra information—go for it!

If you can send in an email or Word document, it saves me a lot of typing.

Please do not send in pdf. Otherwise, I'll take it written longhand. (*Ed.*)

Otter, same aircraft that was used in Region 3 that year. I knew that **Bob Nicol** (MSO-52) was the pilot and would respond to a call for “Jumper 1” the call sign for the Gila Aircraft. But he was on a different frequency and the plane continued up the river.

Help soon arrived with Bernie on a dead run. Joey was still unconscious. He was lying against the slope with nothing holding him but the chute. We pulled him up to a less precarious position and were able to get him secured to the backboard Phil had dropped earlier. We first treated Joey for a broken back which turned out to be correct. He never regained consciousness before we evacuated him.

We assessed our position and determined that

by dropping a few trees a helicopter could land right at that spot. The otter had already called for a helicopter which was coming out of Joseph, Oregon. The pilot was quite capable and was able to set the front end on the ground while maintaining a hover while we loaded Joey. He was on his way to medical care.

The three of us put out the fire that night and returned to Grangeville the next day. We were told that Joey indeed had broken his back and was at St Patrick’s Hospital in Missoula. As soon as I arrived in Missoula, I visited him. He was in good spirits and said he is expected to fully recover. He added one more story to the history of smoke-jumping adventures and the “devil winds” on the Salmon River breaks. 📌

Higgins Ridge Film Premieres in Missoula

by **Breanna McCabe**, (Montana PBS producer of *Higgins Ridge*)

Six smokejumpers who survived the Higgins Ridge wildfire in 1961 and the pilot who rescued them attended a special screening for an upcoming Montana PBS documentary retelling the story.

“Higgins Ridge,” named for the location of the fire in Idaho’s Selway Bitterroot Wilderness, debuted at the historic Wilma Theatre in downtown Missoula to an audience of more than 500 attendees on Oct. 6, 2022.

In the film, 12 of the 20 smokejumpers, who jumped onto Higgins Ridge on Aug. 4, 1961, share the story of how the fire surrounded them, forcing them to shelter in place. About three hours later, John-

son Flying Service helicopter pilot **Rod Snider** (NCSB-51) managed to land on the ridge in smoke and wind and shuttle the smokejumpers to safety. Snider, now 92 years old, is featured in the documentary along with many of his original photos taken in 1961.

Snider and six of the smokejumpers he saved attended the premiere. Family members of Higgins Ridge Fire foreman **Fritz Wolfrum** (MSO-53), squadleader **Darrel “Pete” Peterson** (MSO-50), Moose Creek Ranger **Bill Magnuson**, and smokejumpers **Roger Siemens** (MSO-59) and **Jim Elms** (GAC-59) were also recognized during the premiere, along with **Jack Gordon** (MSO-64), whose brother

Don Gordon (MSO-59) was on Higgins Ridge but unable to attend the Missoula event.

Most of the interviews for “Higgins Ridge” were collected in 2019 as part of the National Museum of Forest Service History’s Higgins Ridge Oral History Project. The museum partnered with Montana PBS producer Breanna McCabe for technical assistance recording the interviews, and McCabe collected additional interviews and materials to weave the stories into one-hour long film. Montana PBS plans to broadcast “Higgins Ridge” in early 2023, and it will be available to view online afterward.

For up-to-date information on the production, visit montanapbs.org/higginsridge. 📌

Allen “Mouse” Owen (Cave Junction ’70) Legend

*For those who knew and worked with Mouse, this was a synopsis of how he died September 6, 1981, in a skydiving accident in North Pole, Alaska. The other letter was a Christmas letter written to Mr. and Mrs. Joe Cappel. Joe Cappel gave this letter to **Phil Lind** (NIFC-01) who then forwarded it to a friend in Boise Retardant Base along with **Leo Cromwell** (IDC-66). Cromwell then forwarded it to me to send to my SMJ Alert Lists. Mouse was a Marine and Smokejumper Legend. RIP Mouse. —**Jerry Ogawa** (MYC-67)*

On Sunday September 6, 1981, at 1400 Allen “Mouse” Owen was killed at the North Pole Skydiving Club twenty miles south of Fairbanks, Alaska. He had been participating in Relative Work Competition, a contest where four-man teams attempt to form various hoop-up patterns while in freefall from 8,000 feet. On this fatal jump, Allen’s team successfully formed five separate patterns, capturing the weekend record. At 3,000 feet, immediately after their parachutes had opened, Allen and another jumper collided with each other. They both were using the square ram-air canopies which have considerable forward speed. Somehow, due to the collision, Allen’s canopy began to malfunction, putting him into a strong spin. Apparently, his lines were entangled with his body, preventing him from jettisoning his main canopy which would allow safe, clean path for his reserve deployment. At 500 feet, his canopy collapsed completely. Observers saw his reserve pilot chute flash out and entangle into his main parachute lines. His reserve parachute never did deploy. A Registered Nurse immediately made full resuscitation efforts. An ambulance arrived on the scene within ten minutes. Doctors at Fairbanks Memorial Hospital believe that Mouse was killed on impact.

None here at the Alaska Smokejumpers can really comprehend that Mouse is gone. He was our cheerful friend and one of the toughest, most careful, and skilled smokejumpers. Mouse has become a legend within the whole smokejumper world, not only



Allen Owen and Clark Noble at McCall 1981. (Courtesy Troop Edmonds)

because of his small size and powerful strength, but because of his vivacious spirit. Mouse lived more fully, did more things, was more active than anyone of us. We will miss him.

The Alaska Smokejumpers

Mouse’s Annual Christmas Letter (1/11/81)

Well, I’m back to my old habits again. It’s mid-January and I still haven’t gotten my annual Christmas letter out. It has been an interesting year to say the least. Only days after I mailed last year’s newsletter, the Forest Service announced the closing of three smokejumper bases in Washington and Oregon, and Cave Junction was one of them. Although I didn’t particularly like it, I probably should have kept my mouth shut except for two things: (1) The report was so poorly written and full of flaws and (2) The government was telling the public that despite the cutbacks in bases and personnel, there would be no reduction in services. Consequently, I did open my mouth along with others at the base and before it was over, we had involved two senators, one congressman, two newspapers, one TV station,

and the county commissioners. We got a one-year moratorium on the closures but there is little doubt that there will only be one jump base in Region 6 from here on out. Most of us are going to Fairbanks in April to jump there. It goes without saying that those of us who “went public” to oppose the government’s lack of planning behind the base closures are not very popular with higher management, and since it is apparent to me that this Region is more than willing to accept mediocrity and being second rate as a firefighting organization, I decided to go north.

I plan to keep my house in Cave Junction and will be spending my winters here. Well, enough of this dribble about the low-life management maggots in the Regional Office. On the bright side, when WWIII starts, the whole planet will more than likely be obliterated and none of the above will have any consequence.

Last April I heard that the military was really hurting for experienced people, so I decided to find out for myself. I made my 14th annual attempt to get back into the Marine Corps. I was a hair-breath away from being either an enlisted flight engineer or navigator, but Marine Corps Headquarters decided I had been out of the Corps too long and therefore contaminated by easy civilian living. Aw, if they only knew. In any case, I will begin plotting next year’s strategy soon.

In May, I floated the Illinois River with eleven friends, and what an experience that was. It has a lot in common with many Laurel and Hardy movies I’ve seen. For example: (1) Found a hole in one of our three rubber rafts as we were loading up to head for the river, (2) Less than an hour after we had launched, the raft with all our food flipped over in a rapid, (3) During the first day I found out that only two people in the group had ever been in whiter water before and that the Illinois River is considered an expert river, (4) Saw my life pass in front of my eyes on several occasions as my erstwhile companion “Trooper Tom” Emonds paddled our two-man raft into the bowels of hell. When it was over, I had to agree it had all been worth it. During the three-day trip, we covered 23 miles and 144 rapids, and the whole weekend was climaxed by, unbeknownst to us, the eruption of Mt. St. Helens.

The same T. Emonds that tried to get me killed on the river, tried to get me married off by sending a \$106 ad to the Mother Earth News magazine extol-

ling my virtues as a lover and all-around man-about-town. I barely got to the editor in time to stop its publication. Lord, when I think about the possible 300-lb., 6’5” female amazon with braded armpits that might have come knocking at my door in the middle of the night, it scares the hell out of me.

I re-sided my whole house with 1"x112" sugar pine lumber and then stained it. If my high school shop teacher could see the workmanship, he would have had heart failure. He would be especially proud to see that I remembered to leave openings for doors and windows.

Fire season was so-so. Had four or five fire jumps and one rescue jump when a helicopter crashed over by the coast. Then, one day before Thanksgiving, I went down to Orange County, California, on one of the big fires that was eating up Southern California. What an organizational nightmare! It was a case of the mentally handicapped telling the blind where to send the incredibly dumb. All in all, a rather expensive joke on the public.

During a landing on a fire jump in August, I got my “bell rung” good. I sustained a busted rib, a wrenched knee, and a sore right arm. The knee and the rib healed great, but the injury to my arm aggravated my already painful tendonitis to the point that it looked like \$6,000 worth of surgery. A friend suggested acupuncture, so I decided to give it a whirl. I spent two weeks in Portland getting the treatment and my arm was responding until I went on the California fire. The pain in back but I’ve decided to gut it out if I can and postpone surgery as long as possible.

Can’t think of anymore news so I will close for now. I was almost able to report the pitter-patter of little feet in the house, but at the last minute, I decided I didn’t need a 200 lb. St. Bernard. Allen Owen-Cave Jct., Oregon. 🔦

Mouse was 4'10", 110 pounds, and a forestry graduate of the University of Missouri. He wrote his congressman when the Marine Corps turned him down and received a waiver. Mouse served three tours, two as a Recon Marine, in Vietnam. As Troop Emonds said in his 2001 article about Mouse, “What was the one base in the jumper world that opened their hands to odd characters, outlaws, and high-spirited types of great contrariness? Cave Junction-the Gobi!” Mouse jumped at CJ 1970-80. (Ed.)



SOUNDING OFF from the Editor



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

How Do You Relate To The Current Managed Fire Policy?

SOME PEOPLE IN the outside world think I am off base in opposing the current “Managed Fire” USFS policy vs quick initial attack. I will admit that I am jaded by the fires in our area of Northern California in the past years. In 2018 the Camp Fire burned down the town of 26,000 people (Paradise, CA) in a matter of hours. There were approximately 85 fatalities but that does not count the number of deaths that occurred in the following months due to the fire. There have been 15-20 more. My family has lived in that area for over 100 years, so I have a definite connection.

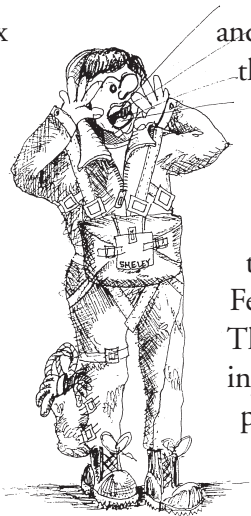
Then in 2018 we had the

Mendocino Complex that burned over a half million acres, destroyed 280 structures and resulted in one death.

In 2019 I went up to Berry Creek and met with the local fire council. I was advocating the development of safe zones vs exiting a fire by the roads which quickly are jammed, as evidenced by the Camp Fire. You can see what happened to Berry Creek later in this piece.

The August Complex, mainly in the Mendocino N.F., originated as 38 separate fires started by lightning on August 16-17, 2020. These fires burned over a million acres. There were 15 jumpers available at Redding and 20 at Redmond, 16 on days off, and 10 on single resource assignments. Both bases jumped out by the 17th. There were 123 jumpers available in the lower 48 on the 16th if pre-positioning before predicted lightning was considered in anyone’s thinking. But it was not done. There were still 96 available on the 17th when the lightning hit the Plumas N.F.

On August 17, 2020, 21 fires were started by lightning on the Plumas N.F. By September 5, all the individual fires had been put out, apart from the Claremont



and Bear Fires which merged on that date. On Sept. 8, strong winds caused the Bear/Claremont Fire to explode in size, rapidly spreading to the southwest. By Sept. 9, the towns of Berry Creek and Feather Falls had been leveled. **The fire killed 16 people** and injured more than 100. (Wikipedia)

As noted above, Redding and Redmond were jumped out on the August Complex and Oregon fires. There were approximately 123 jumpers available at other bases, but there was no pre-positioning of jumpers prior to the lightning storms that hit Northern California.

The Dixie Fire in 2021 burned almost a million acres and destroyed a couple more towns. In Chico, where I live, we have become the wildfire capitol of the world. When you have 85 people killed in one fire, 16 in another fire, and over a million acres burned on either side of your town, you might understand how I feel.

Community Remembers Bear Fire That Killed 16

Chico Enterprise-Record September 11, 2022: “As a disrupted community remembered the second anniversary of the Bear Fire which leveled the communities of Berry Creek and Feather Falls, some were still waiting to rebuild their lives. The Bear Fire was part of

the North Complex Fires which affected communities of Butte County and Plumas County, killing 16 people during September 2020.”

Two Years Later—Rancher Dave Daley reflects on the 2020 devastation of the 2020 Bear Fire—and what has happened since.

Chico Enterprise-Record September 16, 2022: “Editor’s note—Two years ago, after hundreds of his cattle were killed by the Bear Fire, lifelong rancher Dave Daley gives us an update on what has happened (and what hasn’t happened) in terms of forest management and his cattle in the past two years.”

Dave Daley—“Two years ago I received a call that the Bear Fire (part of the North Complex Fire) had jumped the Middle Fork of the Feather River and was tearing through our cattle range and headed toward Oroville. I will never forget that day and the two weeks that followed. Everything was destroyed. Sixteen people killed in the town of Berry Creek and the entire town obliterated. I have never seen anything of the intensity of the Bear Fire. Literally nothing alive.

“So, what has changed in two years? There has been some progress in the discussion to reduce fuel loads through prescribed fire, thinning, grazing and timber management—but the conversation **resulted in little action.**

“The good: There are more prescribed fire associations being organized; the California Cattlemen’s Association led an effort to create an ‘Ag Pass for

Livestock,’ loosely based off my experience trying to gain access to my range to protect livestock during the Bear Fire, that has been signed by Governor Newsome. Good, but not nearly enough.

“I have been having conversations with legislators who have begun to recognize the scope of the problem that is devastating the West. Talk is cheap. Yet, there are still no projects at scale that truly could change the trajectory of destruction.

“I see local prescribed fire associations that are excited to do a 20-acre control burn. I applaud their enthusiasm, but it is a drop in the bucket. We spend resources to meet and map and study and form groups to study it again. As I said two years ago, ‘DO SOMETHING.’ Ask those who live and work on the land for solutions.

“I have yet to see meaningful resources directed to the post-fire management landscape. Many of these lands are left with dead timber, only to have brush sprouts in the deadfall, creating yet another massive fuel load. Why haven’t we actively applied the proven tools of prescribed fire, replanting, timber management and grazing? It is almost as if once it is burnt, the government ignores the problem and focuses resources elsewhere.

“To be blunt, the government has created impossible legislative and regulatory barriers (the California Environmental Quality Act and the National Environmental Policy Act) that bureaucratize the rapid deployment of resources to even rebuild communities, let alone

the landscape. Paradise, the town destroyed by the 2018 Camp Fire, just received word of federal funding to rebuild infrastructure—four year later! And yet, the natural lands are forgotten. I wish there was some consideration given to our ecosystems that support us all. Out of sight, out of mind? Tragic.

“Cattle ranchers can be part of the solution if resources are provided to help them create significant fuel breaks. As a collective, cattle ranchers own or manage over **38 million acres** of rangeland in California. As a group, they are the largest property owners and managers in the state.

“We took a small ‘test’ group of cows back this year. It has been ugly and difficult. It is not the spectacular beauty of the Sierra Nevada that we have loved forever. But it was important to all my family to continue.

“The cows are doing fine on the limited recovery allotment. But the contrast between the checkerboard of private and federal lands is shocking. Sierra Pacific Industries has aggressively removed burnt timber for the past two years and has replanted millions of trees. **The Forest Service has done nothing.**

“The Plumas N.F. just released a very small timber sale. The dense canopy of burnt trees has been standing dead for two years, awaiting a big north wind when the black giant trees will fall all at once. The federal lands are a massive deadfall waiting to burn again. At least 35,000 acres of devastated federally owned land are completely untouched in my

grazing allotment. Bureaucracy doesn't work.

"We burnt over four million acres in 2020 and 2.5 million acres last year.

Once it's burnt, it is forgotten. I won't forget the Bear Fire.

"The beautiful forest of my childhood and the generations who came before is no more. The dead trees stand as silent beacons and reminders of our arrogance and ignorance. The roar of silence echoing down the dead canyons has replaced the constant murmur of life. We created this devastation and have no one to blame but ourselves. Not listening to the land. Not listening to the wisdom of the past. It saddens me.

"Resilient? Ranchers define the word."

Frank Carroll (Managing Partner Professional Forest Management—a Colorado owner and operated business): "It is true that indirect firing ops beginning September 3-8

were the independent factor and primary cause of the almost 200,000-acre blowup on September 9, 2020, that burned Mr. Daley out and killed 16 people. Among the compounding outrages of these monster firing ops is the FS unwilling to do AARs or FLAs so they can face their titanic errors and learn from experience."

Towns Lost in Northern California Past Three Years

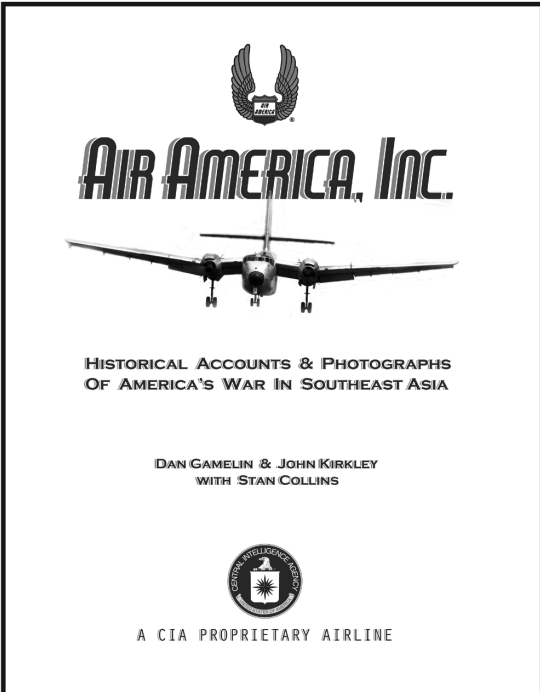
Concow, Paradise, Magalia, Butte Creek Canyon, Greenville, Canyondam, Warner Valley, Grizzly Flats, and portions of many other communities.

USFS Mission Statement: To sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the nation's forests and grasslands to **meet the needs of present and future generations.**

As I was completing this article, I watched the October 2, 2022, edition of 60 Minutes and their reporting on the Caldor Fire that took Grizzly Flats

off the map. One just must view that program to have a total sense of helplessness. We are doomed to a future of smoke and fire in Northern California. We need quick initial attack and an organization that works at night. That will not happen with the USFS. Can CalFire take over fighting wildfire in our forests in this state? Don't ignore what is happening in Northern California as it will move north on an annual basis. Maybe when your towns burn and your neighbors are killed, you will become concerned with the "Managed Fire" concept.

Those of us who want quick initial attack on all wildfires are in the minority. This will not change until a person has had their house and lands burned. In most cases this is just a window for the future. Want to become a person who opposes burning us back to the 10th century—speak up! 🗣️



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A Jumper's Reprieve

by Don Baker (Missoula '65)

This incident occurred during my last summer of jumping, August 1971. The Redmond Air Center had been cleaned out due to a big fire bust. There were only about 10 Redmond jumpers left. Missoula sent over a booster crew to help us out.

We received a fire call that morning and loaded up the Doug with about half Redmond and half Missoula jumpers. There had been a lightning storm the previous day that had scattered small lightning strikes across the Cascades, mostly on the Willamette National Forest.

We started dropping two-man sticks on the various fires, and then it became our turn. I was paired with a Missoula jumper by the name of **Ron McGinnis** (MSO-68). Luckily for me, I was the senior jumper, so I had the radio in my leg pocket and jumped first. **Pat McCauley** (NCSB-63) was the spotter.

The fire was a tall snag burning on a ridge top that contained some of the tallest Douglas fir I had ever seen. It was on the Mackenzie Ranger District.

I found out later that part of the Willamette National Forest contained some of the largest commercial timber in North America! The trees were 5-6 feet in diameter and more than 250 feet tall, and there were damned few open areas to land!

The spotter and I talked it over as we flew around the ridge, and we saw a small patch of "reprod" – reproduction – growing not far from the burning snag. The trees were maybe 30-40 feet tall. Pat said to head for them and try to get down.

It was a warm, sunny day without a cloud in the sky. I got the slap on the leg and out we went. I started heading for the reprod patch, while Ron, for some reason, decided to head downslope and get out of the big trees. I could tell in the plane he was a little nervous about hanging up in those big Doug fir.

The wind drift was negligible, and I could tell

I was just going to miss the reprod patch. I turned into the last of the big trees and remembered what I had been told in training, "If you're going to hang up, bag the tree good!"

I grabbed my risers just as I went through the very top of the tree's canopy and waited for the tug that would let me know I had hung up. No tug and I was still falling. I looked up and saw that the chute canopy had collapsed and followed me through the tree canopy. I was free-falling about 250 feet above the ground!

It's funny how in an emergency situation everything slows down and becomes very clear. I looked down at the ground and saw that I was falling toward a smaller Doug fir that I estimated was 40-60 feet tall.

I thought to myself, *I need to hit that tree, wrap my arms and legs around it, strip every branch off it as I fall to the ground and maybe it might cushion my landing.*

Just then as I looked down – remember, I had said it was a clear, sunny day – I saw this circular shadow on the ground. I looked back up and my chute had re-inflated, and I was coming down under a full canopy.

The slope was pretty steep where I landed, and my roll wouldn't have impressed my training foreman. I was just thankful to be alive. I immediately grabbed the radio from my leg pocket and yelled into it, "I'm alive. I'm alive!"

McCauley came back and said, "I am glad to hear that. You had us scared there for a minute."

I replied, "You were scared? How the hell do you think I felt?"

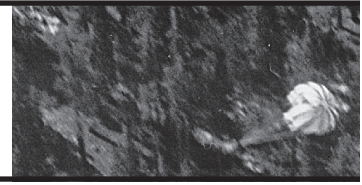
After we returned from the fire, I was talking with Pat about that jump. He told me they had seen my chute collapse and didn't know what had happened. He put two jumpers in the door with the litter and medical supplies and was going to make one more pass, and if he hadn't heard from me the jumpers were coming after me.

I am sure that someone was looking out for me that day, and I was given a "jumper's reprieve." 🙏



THE JUMP LIST

Men of 1956-57



This column is part of the NSA History Preservation Project. All information will be kept in the Smokejumper Archives at Eastern Washington University. The following jumpers have responded to my request for bio information. Many thanks. I do have more bios but am only doing NSA members at this time.. —Chuck Sheley

Jess L. Abney
(Missoula '56)

Jess was born July 19, 1934, in Springfield, Missouri, where he grew up and graduated from Central H.S. in 1951. He then earned his bachelor's from Drury University in Springfield before starting a 32-year career with the Marine Corps. Jess retired with the rank of Sergeant Major. After the Marine Corps, Jess worked in city government in Springfield. He jumped at Missoula during the 1956 season.

Robert W. Benzie
(Missoula '56)

Robert was born February 2, 1936, in Honolulu, Hawaii, where his parents were in the Army—father in the Army Air Corps and mother a nurse with the Army. He left Hawaii in 1942 and moved to Great Falls, Montana, where he graduated from Great Falls H.S. in 1955. Robert got his bachelor's from Montana State College in 1959 and served in the Army Reserves from 1953-61.

He was an art teacher and worked as a tax agent for the Burlington Northern Railway for 20 years, retiring in February 1998. Robert lives in Billings, Montana (2021). He jumped at Missoula during the 1956 season.

Charles W. "Charlie" Brown
(Idaho City '56)

Charlie was born January 3, 1937, in a farmhouse about six miles west of Rush Springs, Oklahoma. The family moved to Long Beach, California, when he was 4-6 years old. "My father worked as an overhead crane operator at the Douglas Plant which built C-47s. At age six, we moved to Midwest City, Oklahoma, when my father applied for employment at the new Douglas Plant which was built adjacent to Tinker Air Force Base, east of Oklahoma City." He graduated from Midwest City H.S. in 1955 and the University of Oklahoma in 1960 with a bachelor's in Chemical Engineering, followed by an MBA from the University of Utah in 1968.

Work Career:

- 1) Atomics International: Design and Plant Engineer, Chatsworth, Calif
- 2) Standard Oil Company of California, Engineering Dept. San Francisco Salt Lake City, UT, four years

4) Chevron Corp, Texas Division, El Paso, TX, Refinery two years

5) Chevron Corporation, Western Division, Denver, CO, seven years

6) Chevron Corp, Texas Division, Houston, TX, one year

7) Koch Industries, Wichita, KS, 19 years

Charlie jumped at Idaho City 1956 and at McCall 1957-59. He is an NSA Life Member and was NSA Treasurer for seven years.

Donald V. "Don" Courtney
(Missoula '56)

Don was born March 8, 1935, in Shawnee, Oklahoma, where he grew up and graduated from Shawnee H.S. in 1953. He earned his bachelor's in Geology from Oklahoma University in 1957 and his master's in Journalism from the same school in 1975. Don entered the Marine Corps in 1957 as an Engineer Officer and retired in 1985 as a Colonel (Reserve). Don was a career CIA Operations/Paramilitary Officer and retired from Staff as a GS-15 in 1985. He spent another 25 years as an independent contractor working in Virginia, North Carolina, Southeast Asia, Africa, Europe, Central America, and the Middle East. Don retired for good in 2005 and currently (2022) lives in Bonner, Montana. Don jumped at

Missoula 1956-57, 61, and at West Yellowstone in 1962.

Robert W. “Bob” Hewitt
(Missoula ’56)

Bob was born February 5, 1936, in Little Rock, Arkansas. He grew up in Memphis, Tennessee, and graduated from Central H.S. in 1954. Bob then earned his bachelor’s degree from Memphis University and his DDS from the University Tennessee College of Dentistry in 1961. He jumped at Missoula 1956-58.

Bob served on active duty in the U.S. Public Health Service as Senior Assistant Dental Surgeon with duty assignments in the Division of Indian Health at Laguna Pueblo, New Mexico, and the U.S. Coast Guard Base at Ketchikan, Alaska.

In 1964 Bob established a private dental practice in Memphis, which he maintained from 1962 until his retirement in 2001. Following his 40-plus years of private practice, Bob worked as the clinical consultant for a large local commercial dental lab. Bob also volunteered on the part-time faculty at UT College of Dentistry.

Bob and his wife, Betty, live in Germantown, TN, at the Village of Germantown.

Herbert “Herb” Hidu
(North Cascades ’56)

Herb was born in Fairfield, Connecticut, in 1931. He enlisted in the Army in 1951 and was a paratrooper with the 82nd Airborne. With the help of the GI Bill, he earned his

Ph.D. studying at the Univ. of Connecticut, Penn State, and Rutgers with an emphasis on marine shellfish. Herb jumped at NCSB during the 1956 season and got four fire jumps. His major professional work has been with marine shellfish research working with the U.S. Bureau of Commercial Fisheries, Rutgers University, the University of Maryland, and the University of Maine. His work at the Univ. of Maine was 20 plus years working with graduate students laying the groundwork for Maine’s oyster industry. “There are now, after 50 years, 150 new oyster farms.” Herb is retired living in Alna, Maine.

“I was only at it (smoke-jumping) for one summer, but it continues to be an important event in my life. One must stand for something and that is what I stand for.”

Patrick W. “Pat” Lee
(McCall ’56)

Pat was born May 19, 1937, in Omaha, Nebraska. He grew up in Atkinson, Nebraska, where he graduated from St. Joseph’s Hall H.S. in 1955. Pat earned a bachelor’s from College of St. Thomas (Atkinson) in 1959, and his LL.B. from Georgetown University School of Law in 1962. “Following Naval OCS in 1963, I served as a naval attorney in the Office of the Judge Advocate General in Washington, D.C. Upon leaving the Navy in 1966, I joined the law firm Pogue & Neal in Washington, D.C. I became a partner in the firm

several years later. I practiced law for 44 years, the last 36 as a founding partner of Crowell and Moring, with offices in several states and foreign countries.

“I retired to live in Idaho at the age of 70. My old smoke-jumper buddy, Jack Brown, and I bought a quarter section in the Sawtooth Valley and built a ranch. My wife, Janis, and I moved to Boise two years ago (2022).” Pat jumped at McCall 1956-57

Michael McCormick
(North Cascades ’56)

Mike was born October 7, 1937, in Tawas City, Michigan, and grew up in Okanogan, Washington; Enterprise, Oregon; and John Day, Oregon, where he graduated from Grant Union H.S. in 1956. He earned a bachelor’s in Political Science from the University of Oregon in 1960. Mike was career U.S. Army 1960-86 and retired as a Colonel and is currently (2022) living in Portland, Oregon. He jumped at NCSB 1956-57.

James J. “Jim” Leheldt
(Grangeville ’56)

Jim was born March 27, 1937, in Ryegate, Montana, where he grew up and graduated from Ryegate H.S. in 1955. He earned a master’s in Electrical Engineering from Montana State University in 1963.

Work Career: Honeywell Automatic Flight Control, Martin Marietta Flight Control, King Radio Corporation Automatic Flight Control.

Designed Autopilot for the Voyager Aircraft for pilots Dick Rutan and Jeana Yeager for their non-stop flight around the world.

Retirement: Retired 2010 after 47 years of very interesting and enjoyable work.

Personal Comments: Smokejumping was best job, great experience meeting and working with young guys and girls from all states who always had interesting backgrounds and stories. Jim jumped at Grangeville 1956-57, 1959-61, and at Missoula 1958. Jim is an NSA Life Member.

Robert A. Mecham
(McCall '56)

Robert was born in Boise, Idaho, in 1937, and grew up in Nampa where he graduated from Nampa H.S. in 1955. He then graduated from the University of Idaho in 1958 and the Northwestern Dental School in 1962 before going into the Army 1962-64. Robert's dental practice was in Spokane, Washington, 1965-95. "Smokejumping—the best job I ever had. McCall was wonderful and I made many lifetime friends in those three summers. Love the reunions." Robert jumped at McCall 1956-59.

Benito O. "Ben" Musquez
(Missoula '56)

Ben joined the Army at age 17 and was a member of the 82nd Airborne Division. After seeing the movie "Red Skies of Montana," he decided to become a smokejumper. After a stint with the Oak Grove

Hotshots in Southern California, he rookied at Missoula where he jumped the 1956-57 seasons. Ben eventually returned to the Army and was in active duty in 1964 with tours in Vietnam to follow. He attended Northwestern State University for two years. Ben was the recipient of many medals including the Bronze Star. He and his wife raised six children, all of whom have served in the military. Ben lives in Iredell, Texas, and is an NSA Life Member.

Roland P. Pera
(Missoula '56)

"I was born in rural North Dakota on June 30, 1936, in the heart of the Great Depression. This was also during an epic drought and heat wave which punished the middle of the country. When I was six days old, the temperature reached 120 degrees, a record that still stands for the state. Our closest town, which was also our address, was Woodworth, population around 150. The town still exists with a population of 25 to 30. I was born at home which was not unusual at that time.

"In ND we lived in a house with no electricity and no running water (our running water was running down to the well and 'fetching' a pail of water). I attended a one-room school a half-mile down the road. One year my oldest sister was my teacher. There were somewhere around a dozen students attending the school. About half of the students were my brothers, sisters, and

my cousins. We had some hairy times walking to school and back home in the winter months.

"When I was in the 6th grade, we left ND moving to a very small town in western Minnesota. Miltona, Minnesota is in the heart of lake country. We certainly enjoyed the fishing, swimming, and boating the area provided. My father was a Lutheran pastor, so I participated in a few moves - from Minnesota to South Dakota; then to Russell, KS; and finally, to Hanover, KS, in northern Kansas. My father was able to preach in German, so all these congregations had German and English services.

"I graduated from Concordia High School, Seward, NE, in 1954. There were 43 of us in our graduating class. My college years were a bit stretched out, first attending a teachers college in Nebraska, and then matriculating to Kansas University and graduating in 1961 with a major in Music Education (later with a master's degree, also in Music Ed).

"My first 'real job' was teaching vocal music for seven years in a Kansas City suburb. During that span of time, I married Betty, also a teacher, who brought us two girls into this world. We are proud of and love our three grandchildren.

"After seven years of teaching, I decided to become a stockbroker, a career that lasted 38 years (the last five, I was half-retired). The stockbroker of today hardly resembles the

stockbroker of 1968 when I started. This is probably true of many professions.

“Retirement has been good to us. We have done considerable traveling which included 16 or 17 cruises, many of those to Europe. Good health has allowed me to go skiing until two years ago. I enjoyed skiing with my good friend Bill Murphy. JB Stone, another smokejumper friend, and I hiked to the summit of six 14,000 peaks in Colorado. By far the most ambitious was Longs Peak. A lot of our travels have been to reunions (I come from a large family).

“We are active in our church even though it is 11 miles away. I directed the bell choir at our church for some 25 years. Traveling to Missoula in the summers during retirement has been very special to me. There was nothing better than seeing my old smokejumper friends while ‘toiling’ on a number of projects in the forests of Montana and Idaho.” Roland jumped at Missoula 1956-59, and 1961.

Doug Sutherland (Cave Junction '56)

Doug was born May 2, 1937, in Helena, Montana, and grew up in Spokane, Washington, where he graduated from V.R. Rogers H.S. in 1955. He then earned his bachelor's from Central Washington University in 1959. Doug jumped at CJ in 1956 and Redding in 1957.

Doug's career:

Boeing Renton, 1960-71

Owner Tacoma Tent and Awning Co., 1971-92
Mayor Tacoma, 1980-89
City Manager, Seatac, 1989-92

Pierce County Executive, 1993-2001

Washing State Commissioner of Public Lands, 2002-09

Private Consultant, 2009-12

Doug and his wife, Grace, are retired living in New River, Arizona.

Robert G. “Bob” Whaley (Missoula '56)

Bob was born January 7, 1935, in Missoula, Montana, and graduated from Carroll College in 1958. He jumped at Missoula 1956-58 while in school. Bob entered the Marine Corps as an Air Officer candidate in September 1958. He entered flight training in January 1959 and received his wings in June 1960. Bob flew three tours in Vietnam, flying over 800 missions and was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross and Bronze Star among the numerous other awards.

Bob retired as a Lt. Colonel in 1979 with more than 5,000 flying hours. He then went into the brokerage business and worked for 24 years. Bob is an NSA Life Member and has been very active in the Trails Program.

Geoffrey F. “Geof” Wilson (Missoula '56)

Geof was born April 23, 1936, in Hartford, Connecticut. He grew up in

Wethersfield, a suburb of Hartford, and graduated from Wethersfield H.S. in 1954. Geof attended Paul Smith's College for one year and then transferred to the U of Montana where he graduated in 1963 with a degree in Forest Management. He took a summer job in 1955 with the Forest Service at Libby, Montana, where he had a wide variety of different work assignments and gained some fire experience. In 1956 he rookied at Missoula and had four fire jumps. Geof entered the army, February 1957, and was a member of the 505 Airborne Battle Group, 82nd Airborne.

After leaving the Army, he took a job on the Gila N.F. handling their timber program. The next summer he took a 6-month seasonal job with the Forest Service in Seward and Juneau, Alaska. From there he was at the Deer Lodge Forest five years, Lolo Forest as an assistant Ranger,

Flathead N.F., Gallatin N.F., and five years as Seward Alaska District Ranger. He was twice elected to Seward City Council. He finished his career as the Wind River District Ranger, Gifford Pinchot N.F. before retiring in 1992.

“Since then, I have been a school bus driver for sports teams [13 years] and on the governing board for Blackfoot Telecom [26 years]. For the last 25 years, I also do the logging, spring and fall, on our forty acres of timber located near St Regis, Montana.”

Douglas M. Bird

(McCall '57)

Doug was born September 2, 1938, in Salina, Utah. "I was raised in Salina and Ephraim, Utah, and went to school in Casper, Wyoming. I always say I grew up in McCall, Idaho. McCall is where I learned how to work, when and how to play, how to be a team member and a team leader. The smokejumpers taught me how to be an ethical, capable, and contributing adult. I graduated from Natrona County High School in 1956. Ran track and wrestled in high school.

"I graduated from Utah State University with a bachelor's in Forestry in 1960 and got a master's in 1961. Received another MS from Univ. of California, Berkeley, with an emphasis in wildland fire

Doug had an extensive

career with the USFS: "After getting the Ranger's job, which is the second-best job after smokejumper in the Forest Service, I spent the next 20 years moving around the US. I went to California to do some fire ecology research, Job Corps Center Director in New Mexico, Chief's office in D.C., Branch Chief in the RO in Missoula, Deputy Supervisor on the Lolo NF, National Fire Suppression Staff at BIFC (now NIFC), Forest Supervisor on the Wayne-Hoosier NF and then my dream job—Regional Director of Aviation and Fire Management for the Intermountain Region in Ogden, Utah. I was one of the so called 'Fire Gods' in the Forest Service. I even had authority over the McCall jumper base. Wow! I spent the last 10 years of my FS career as the Director of Aviation and Fire Manage-

ment and then retired from the FS in 1990."

Jon B. Bledsoe

(Missoula '57)

Jon was born December 8, 1937, in Oklahoma City, and grew up in Lawton and graduated from high school in 1955. He furthered his education at the University of Oklahoma (1955-57) and earned a degree in Forest Management from the University of Idaho in 1960. Jon jumped at Missoula 1957-59.

He then started a 34-year career with the USFS: Dispatcher at the Moose Creek RS 1960, Forester Nez Perce NF 1960-64, Resource Assn't. Nez Perce 1964-68, Supervisory Forester Bitterroot NF 1968-71, District Ranger Idaho Panhandle NR 1971-74, District Ranger Clearwater NF 1974-93 (retired). 🦋

Neil Satterwhite—"Don't You F-----s Leave Me!"

by Mike Nielson (McCall '73)

MCCALL DROPPED A DOUG load of jumpers that included me and Neil on the Bearskin Creek Fire on the Boise N.F. in July '73. The jump spot was a clearing adjacent to a road that already had a Forest Service vehicle parked on it, so we didn't have the usual "first on, in charge" approach jumpers are usually used to. Nevertheless, we packed up our gear, gathered our cargo and assembled as a crew by Neil. Ready to fight fire, we, as a crew, moved off the jump spot road and headed to the burn only to be met by the Forest Service vehicle driver outfitted in full desk job uniform asking who was in charge seemingly blind to the diminutive, gravelly-voiced leader in front of the 11 of us following him. Neil said he was. "Desk Job" asked

his name. "Satterwhite."

"OK, Satter, I want you to take your crew....."

"It's Satterwhite!"

"OK, White, take your crew and go up the right flank...."

Neil had had enough of "Desk Job." Didn't say another word and proceeded to lead us up the LEFT flank in an obvious dismissal that no uniformed desk job was going to tell Neil how to fight fire.

Neil had a gravelly voice from the wounds he'd suffered in Vietnam as a Forward Artillery Observer who had been wounded when he called in an arty strike on his overrun position. When his unit re-took the position, Neil was laying on the LZ with

his intestines outside his body. The personnel on the dust-off chopper took one look at him, knew his was KIA and was powering up to lift off when Neil reached out, gathered his innards, and graveled out from a throat wound, "Don't you f-----s leave me." Neil spent a year in the VA hospital in Seattle recovering. Discharged with a 100% disability after tak-

ing the VA to task for the deplorable conditions in the hospital, Neil went back to being a McCall Smokejumper. 🕒

Neil jumped at McCall 1965-66, 69-73, 75, and at Boise 1976-77. He died January 7, 2011 and was an NSA Life Member. (Ed.)

Smokejumper Profile

by Roy Korkalo (Missoula '61)

The camaraderie that I experienced among smokejumpers in the 1960s is still alive today. It is certainly stronger than other groups or associations. I hope that is true for all decades of jumpers. When I think of my six seasons of jumping, many vivid memories prevail. Most are good, some are not. Here is a collage of remembrances.

The people in the towns of the various bases were always great and very supportive. Silver City, Grangeville, Fairbanks, and Missoula lead the list, but the little places are equally important—all the USFS Ranger Stations, Moose Creek Ranch, and Hole In The Wall Lodge.

In 1961 **Doug Daniels** (MSO-61) and I dominated the MSO base pool table. The Orchard Homes Grocery where we bought beer was convinced that smokejumpers were at least 21 years old. Two years so did every bar in Silver. I was still 20. My first fire jump was into the Bob. For six years I never heard the end of inadvertently kicking over Hal and Lyle's last pot of coffee.

I saw back-to-back tough Idaho fires—Corn Creek and Higgins Ridge. I'm sure many jumpers often think of those fires. We couldn't find the Corn Creek Fire for 24 hours because of smoke, then it found us. Sitting on the rockslide, walking out to the Salmon, busting the food line—that was an exciting week.

I jumped near Higgins Ridge on later fires and, when looking at the barren scar it made, was reminded of how close tragedy was. Some had shouted, "Your clothes are on fire!" I turned to see who, and it was me! My pant legs were

blazing. The fire had created its own weather. I was carrying a 5-gallon water can which provided us wet handkerchiefs to breathe through as we scurried here and there looking for the best air to breathe. Finally, a helicopter extraction ended the ordeal. What a great display of flying ability!

Alaska—a burlap bag in hand surely felt different than a Pulaski. I haven't exited an aircraft about midnight since seeing the sun at the horizon. And as Doug would say: "Striped belly, needle-nosed, blood sucking hover bugs—the mosquitos!" How about the rail trip with Tom and Jim to Mt. McKinley N.P., the road trip to Valdez, Tok Junction work, Eagle, Chicken, and the homemade sun heated shower.

Silver, 1963, and a real cheat of death, a complete streamer. That's a summer I won't forget. Lower than usual flight altitude because of wind, and higher than usual ground elevation coupled with good training which reminded me to throw the reserve vs just pull, all combined for a jump on the Palomas Fire in New Mex. Thinking about it afterwards was scary. There were many fire jumps that summer, 14 out of Silver City, then eight more out of Missoula. The Gila N.F. produced fire names like Sam, Night. Ah, I remember the runs to Las Palomas for Class VI resupply, and the timed five-minute Spur fire with Gary—five minutes first work to fire declared out.

We were always concerned about getting back and getting on "the list," hoping to ace people and getting another fire jump first. After the Lick Creek Fire, I hopped a freight train somewhere

in the St. Joe N.F. in Idaho and had a speedy trip back to Missoula. It worked. I think it was soon after that fire that a notice was posted saying we could use only USFS arranged transportation.

Later I saw another St. Joe fire, Durham Creek with Jake and Kent. Getting my 50th jump pin in 1963 was a fitting end to my third season. Along on that ride were Sigma Nu fraternity brothers Jim, Jake, Gary, Tim, and Larry. Who landed on the logging camp building roof then fell off? Probably Larry.

Then there was a classic 1964 ten-minute, two-man fire near Moose Creek in Idaho's Selway Bitterroot Primitive Area. The highlight was finding a full fifth of Old Forester on the trail. It must have fallen off a hunting party's pack horse and survived the winter.

I remember a very cold and snowy August night on a two-manner with Fergie in the Nez Perce. Snow and of all things, the fire name was Dixie.

Erik probably remembers the eight-hour packout near Moose Creek, and the picture of my pants split at the crotch as I took our picture looking across the valley again at the dead hillside of Higgins Ridge.

In 1965 after mopping up the Goat Creek two-man fire near Red River, Idaho, Marty and I discovered we did not have a map! That made for an interesting hike out.

The year 1966 marked significant events—graduated from the University of Montana, commissioned in the U.S. Army, married Susan Foster, jumped that summer and went on active duty. West Yellowstone was booming as usual the summer of 66.

Many things always seem to balance out: The five and ten-minute fires vs digging line all night and all day, good fishing vs no fishing (you didn't carry a pole?), the quick smooth flight and jump vs flying 14 bumpy hours watching two-manners go out, others barf, and coming up one fire short only to fly home—the gobbler and skin bubbler vs the easy two manner.

Updrafts, the first two who jumped out of the plane were higher than drop altitude when the DC-3 made its second drop run. The next two out must have hit a corresponding down draft

because they seemed to hit the ground in less than ten seconds. One was coming in so fast with a full canopy that he threw his reserve, anyway, probably hoping to help catch a tree.

The swimming pool, a converted Borate tank, at the Grangeville base was great after volleyball. It was almost as good as taking the old Motorola to the beach on the Clearwater while being on call.

Cutting the tops off five-gallon aluminum gas cans and throwing a lighted match on top was one way to stay warm.

How about the 1965 Forester's Ball! Using a smokejumper jumpsuit and helmet and my own skydiving chute, I jumped into the Oval at the University of Montana in Missoula (called Montana State University in 1965), then got a chopper ride out.

I can picture throwing away cans of seemingly less than desirable food, only to scour the bushes for them several days later. That's sort of like the cargo chutes that went "over the ridge" never to be found.

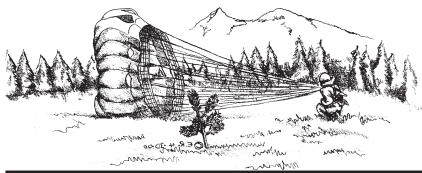
The training jump in MSO when I was last out had the winds figured perfectly and was practically assured to win the jump pot—another parachute malfunction, reserve, and no jump pot dollars.

Orchard Homes Termination jumper parties. Have you ever surprisingly fallen into a body of water at night and only after several moments of desperate swimming realize you were swimming down a ditch?

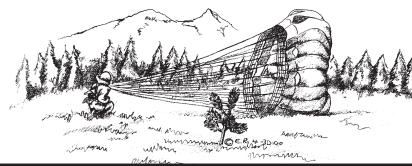
Crepe paper streamers were in place on the ground spelling out NOW in answer to the aerial observer's question of when do you want to come out (by chopper)? But in the air, Joe flew over in the opposite direction and saw MON, It was Friday.

I began an Army career following the 1966 season. With several hundred jumps behind me, every time things started to get rough or downright miserable as an Airborne Ranger, Aviator and Artillery Officer, all I had to do was think about what I had learned in my smokejumping experiences—like some of the tough flights, jumps, fires, hikes, hills, hunger, and thirst I'd seen. Then current problems became smaller.

Now I regularly see many old friends and look forward to the next Smokejumper Reunion. 🍷



Notes from the Ranks



Pat McGunagle
(West Yellowstone '19)

WHOEVER CLAIMED “APRIL is the cruelest month” was no smokejumper. October by far takes the cake for happy cruelty. I had ice on my tent this morning and yet I’m here in ninety-seven degrees sweating a few hours later. We’re losing six minutes of daylight each shift here on Division Echo of a fire near Hells Canyon. The elk are bugling too frequently and breathlessly, like a new crew boss trainee on the radio, except the elk have more substantive issues to relate.

October frost kills spawn new, flashy-fire activity after a few days of curing. October invites the mental angst of chancing staying on the list for one or two final jumps to the year or going out single resource and wringing the last drops of overtime and hazard out of the season’s big campaign fires. October is humiliating: there’s no graceful way to take off long Johns under Nomex and fireboots

when the day warms up after an early season snowfall. October scheming can be paralyzing: If the elk tag can get filled by November, can I make it to Barcelona for Thanksgiving? Bogota by Christmas? And Asheville for spring burning by February? Cruel October!

2022 was a fantastic jumper season. Did you see the list in Alaska in July? How GAC and RAC and WYS and MSO all jumped out early season? The catalog of Good Deals this year sounds immense: the GAC bros that commandeered a jet boat to fight fire along the Snake River Hells Canyon corridor for two weeks, Apocalypse Now style; the AK bros that jumped a walrus sanctuary island, landing among them on the beach; the hero jump MSO bros accomplished on the Elmo fire, burning off retardant Large Air Tanker lines immediately after each drop; the ridiculous cabin save a RDD/AK load pulled off ahead of a gob; the picture-perfect Dinosaur Monument jump a load of BOI/AK bros sent out of Provo; the full-on Type II team a load of young Boise bros put together out of nothing in nowhere, AK, and successfully ran for several weeks before a IMT2 took over for them and simply carried on with their original plans, just with more people,

TVs, printers and computers, and maps that weren’t just Sharpie maps on cardboard smokejumper food boxes; the Boise bro that scored six jumps in nine days; and many more that will come out in due time. With the Good Deals this year come of course the flips: the no-tent while in AK flips, the tattoo flips, the gun flips, the mohawk flips, the no-Foodbox-food-allowed forager and tradesman flip, the multi-thousand-dollar Big Flip in AK, the eat this weird bug for money flips, and of course the ice cream flips.

The remnants of the blockbuster AK season trickled down across jump operations in the Lower 48 for the rest of the season. I wish I could track exactly how much our programs intersperse when seasons like this big boost year happens. In August I packed a West Yellowstone drogue with an Alaska ram-air chute into a Missoula container. All these parts and pieces get shipped back to their respective bases in the offseason, but if only they could tell of their travels. Like these components, jokes, tall tales, rumors, laughs, cool knots, and all other necessities to this jumper culture intermingle.

The year just really wasn’t as critical for fire behavior as in years past. Juniper needles weren’t crumbling into dust

in one's hand; the duff layers weren't burning deep, and our footboxes were rarely empty when we demobed from fires. Half my jumps were single-night two- or four-manners; the longest was a six-day fire with a whole load of bros. I don't think many of the guys ran out of chew on any fire! If not for several single resource assignments, I'd be several hundred hours of overtime behind normal: again, the retention bonus paying out this year is something to be thankful for. The year was just busy enough to where most hotshot crews are sitting pretty on OT and hazard pay, but talk to some caterers or shower unit personnel and they're very behind on income for a typical fire year. Oh, the feast and famine that is seasonal work!

Nationally, we never hit Planning Level Five (PL5). In 2021, we were at PL5 for 69 days. In 2022, we were at PL4 nationally for only ten

days. The only regions to hit PL5 this year were the Southwest and Alaska, and while it was a critical fire season up there in the land of smoke-jumping under midnight sun, that state just doesn't have the population centers and critical infrastructure that a PL5 in places like CA and OR implies. The early PL5 in the SW region was in part due to resources being gobbled up by the large lost prescribed fire of Hermit's Peak/Calf Canyon. Inertia on aggressive prescribed fire programs will no doubt increase unless the lessons learned from that fire are humbly and universally learned and accepted.

The season of thanks is coming up. For some wildland firefighters, those first calls back from jump bases will be the first they've heard about their long shot applications toward completing a life's goal. On single resource assignments like the one I'm currently on, smokejumpers,

through examples of leadership or competence, may pollinate the folds of wildland fire personnel with the inspiration that makes future smokejumpers. This is the cyclical time of year where I can dig line with a first-year firefighter in a less tense environment than the critical fire weather of July. The jumper status report shows more jumpers out on single resource assignments than on fires jumped, and for good reason: many districts have laid off their seasonals already, hotshot crews are starting to become scarce, and there is a wealth of experience represented by smokejumpers that would otherwise be sitting latently around planes that soon go off contract. Best to lead forward, lead up, and learn to play in new roles—and pack a warm jacket for October fires, too.

Onward to fall and winter, and to suss out just what all those elk were bugling such a fuss about. 🦌

In Defense Of Red Tape: Debunking Several Myths About NEPA

by Dan Leininger (North Cascades '17)

It is as easy to bemoan the bureaucratic red tape that slows down forest management as it is to scratch a line around a two-manner fire. Yet the United States' basic environmental charter, the National Environmental Policy Act – NEPA – is important. And despite its shortcomings, our forests would be much worse off without it.

While NEPA litigation is one of the legal tools

environmental organizations use to slow down and halt projects on federal lands, it is also *the* reason federal agencies are accountable to public input in the first place. Because of NEPA, jumpers and former jumpers have the ability to comment on proposed projects and introduce design features that apply the hard-earned experience of “field guys and gals.”

In this essay, I hope to debunk a few persistent myths about NEPA, and explain several features of the law that jumpers can leverage to enact productive change on our forest resources.

The first myth is that *NEPA compliance is a relatively new development*. Put into other words, this myth suggests that *in the past decade land managers have become so bogged down by compliance that they can't get any real work done*.

But NEPA is not new. Unless you rookied before the mid-sixties, NEPA has been a part of forest management for most, if not all, of your fire career. NEPA was the product of a bipartisan congress and signed into law by President Richard Nixon in 1969.

It's hard to imagine in 2022, but beginning in the late 1960s and lasting until about 1980, a bipartisan Congress enacted a slate of unprecedented environmental statutes that fundamentally altered America's relationship with the environment. One only has to travel to countries without fierce environmental protections like the Clean Air Act (CAA), Clean Water Act (CWA), and Endangered Species Act (ESA) to see that our clean air and clean water are no accident. Instead it is a testament to the strength of those environmental laws.

The often-overlooked stepchild of this famous environmental legislation is NEPA – a law that compels federal decision-makers take a hard look at environmental impacts whenever a project significantly affects the human environment. This law has been an integral part of U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, and National Park Service decision-making for more than 50 years.

The second common NEPA myth is that *NEPA mandates particular environmental outcomes*. This myth can manifest when people are (justifiably) frustrated by the glacial pace of forest-restoration projects and argue that NEPA prevents federal land managers from cutting trees to benefit the larger forest.

However, NEPA is a procedural statute. This means rather than mandating particular requirements in the same way that the ESA generally prohibits actions that could kill or “take” endangered species, NEPA ensures federal agencies follow a protocol and disclose the impacts of their projects.

Importantly, NEPA does not prohibit actions

The often-overlooked stepchild of this famous environmental legislation is NEPA – a law that compels federal decision-makers take a hard look at environmental impacts whenever a project significantly affects the human environment.

that adversely affect the environment. Rather, it imposes a procedure to ensure federal agencies take a “hard look” and potential impacts so that decision-makers and the public are informed as to how the agency has come to a particular decision. This procedural mandate makes public engagement possible because it makes public decisions transparent, and allows for the public to engage in the decision-making process.

When environmental organizations succeed with NEPA litigation, it is when they can show that the agency failed to take a required step in the decision-making process, not when they allege the agency engaged in an environmentally destructive activity.

So where do we go from here? I will be the last person to argue that NEPA is perfect. Nor can I ignore that NEPA is sometimes used by bad-faith actors to ignore the forest for the trees and worse, to stall projects on the basis of “not in my backyard.” But deadlock in Washington, D.C. makes a major NEPA overhaul very unlikely.

Presidential administrations do tweak NEPA regulations somewhat, but the fundamental procedural requirements of NEPA are likely to remain unchanged into the foreseeable future. Fortunately, the very structure of NEPA allows us – citizens invested in the health and productivity of our forests – to affect substantive outcomes on federal lands without relying on elected officials, in several key ways.

First, NEPA's procedural requirements make public comment possible. Since proposed projects cannot be promulgated in the dead of night without public input, NEPA gives us the opportunity to engage in the decision-making process. For-

est Service projects, for example, are announced years ahead of implementation and must follow a predictable procedure.

Furthermore, the Forest Service and BLM – in addition to other federal agencies – are required to seek public input from proposed actions affecting federal lands. Rather than dismiss public comment whole cloth, NEPA requires agencies to respond to public comment; and specifically address comments and alternatives raised by the public.

While yes, this certainly creates additional hoops for the agencies to jump through, we would be remiss to miss the opportunity to have a hand in shaping these projects – after all, the timber industry and environmentalists alike have been using this feature of NEPA for years!

Federal agencies frequently incorporate the public's comments into projects, especially when suggested changes are supported by good science. Unlike many statutes that concentrate power in the hands of the powerful and well-connected, NEPA puts us individual members of the public on even footing with large interest groups when we make public comments on federal projects.

The second and more important way jumpers can use NEPA to affect outcomes on federal lands is through forest collaboratives. Forest collaboratives are organizations composed of diverse stakeholders – some of whom hold directly conflicting positions on forest management – who collectively consider actions that improve the management of natural resources for the benefit of *both* the environment and surrounding communities.

Most national forests have associated forest collaboratives, and the successful ones are composed of individuals representing a broad cross section of tribal, economic, logging and environmental interests.

The key word here is *diverse*. The more diverse the stakeholders, the more clout the forest collaborative has to shape Forest Service policy. Most people who live, work, recreate, and engage in federal lands have a more nuanced sense of good forest management than cable news pundits would have us believe.

When loggers and environmentalists come to the table with pre-negotiated “zones of agreement” – specific agreements as to what constitutes good forest management – agency decision makers

tend to be quite responsive to the forest collaborative's insights. As a deeply cynical law student, I was thoroughly encouraged when I learned how individuals from across the political spectrum engage with one another to make productive steps towards better forest management.

However, forest collaboratives are only as strong as the people who sit down together to work through thorny issues. This is not a panacea to all our political differences, but rather an invaluable opportunity to push the ball forward incrementally.

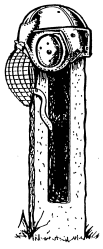
Jumpers – especially old jumpers who voice ire at contemporary forest management – should take a leading role in forest collaboratives because we have hard-earned insight into fire behavior and forest management. For example, jumpers who worked before the era of megafires have invaluable perspective into the ways fire behavior has changed over the past three decades. These insights could help managers understand how fire has historically moved through landscapes, and plan projects accordingly. Jumpers also have a trained eye for fuel loading and forest health indicators.

Finally, jumpers can be peacemakers, bringing nuance to logging debates since very few classes of people have as good a sense of the complexities associated with timber felling as jumpers. This wisdom from the field can help steer projects toward maximum beneficial impacts.

As I write in September 2022, there is money from the Infrastructure Bill earmarked for forest restoration, but the Forest Service needs help getting good projects rolling.

In the history of smokejumping, has there ever been a load of eight bros who ever had the same personal and political views? My guess is no. In spite of diverse opinions, I doubt petty policy preferences have ever been the reason a jumper-fire didn't get caught.

If we want to improve forest management, jumpers need to lean into the difficult conversations and messy sausage-making of forest policy, rather than criticize it from the sidelines. Accordingly, NEPA and the emergence of forest collaboratives should be conceptualized as our tools to take care of public lands, not as a barrier to getting good work done. 🦋



Off The List

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

Chuck Sheley
10 Judy Lane
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Neil Lawrence Dibble (North Cascades '50)

Neil died September 9, 2022. He came from a Methow Valley pioneer family and was born at home in Winthrop, Washington. His brother, **Danny** (NCSB-51), was also a jumper. Neil graduated from Winthrop H.S. in 1946 and went on to Washington State College in 1951 to earn a teacher's degree. Neil enlisted in the USAF pilot program, but after the death of his father, he was released from duty. He did graduate work at Washington State Collage and a full year National Science Foundation scholarship at Oregon State College. Upon completion taught at Omak, Washington.

Neil taught at various eastern Washington schools and spent 27 years teaching math, science, and computer science at both junior and senior high schools and was a junior high principal for six years retiring in 1986. Neil jumped at NCSB 1950.

Luke Amon Birky (Missoula '45)

Luke, 100, died September 3, 2022. He was born January 8, 1922, on a farm near Airlie, Oregon. Luke is the descendent of Swiss and German Mennonite grandparents who came to the U.S. in the 1700s. He remembers being beaten up several times during school by bullies that tested his faith and belief of "non-resistance."

He worked on the family farm until he was drafted in the CPS in 1943. He started out in La Pine, Oregon, before joining the smokejumpers in 1945. Luke made seven practice, seven fire, and two rescue jumps.

Luke was discharged in 1946 and returned to Oregon where he worked as a mechanic/welder before enrolling in Goshen College in Indiana. He married in 1947, and he and his wife went to Puerto Rico at the request of the Mennonite Central Committee to do work for the needy.

They returned to the states in 1954 and moved to Colorado where Luke became a hospital administrator at LaJunta. In 1966 they move to Elkhart, Indiana, where he was Secretary of Health and Welfare for the Mennonite Board of Missions. Then back to Albany, Oregon, in 1979 where Luke assumed direction of a Mennonite retirement program. He retired in 1987 while working another program in Costa Rica.

"Smokejumping—I'd do it all again. Living with people of conviction but from varied backgrounds and perspectives became a time of evaluation and maturing. It was a time to increase vision of what it meant to be a follower of the Prince of Peace and become more socially responsible."

Ronald L. "Ron" Borst (North Cascades '64)

Ron, 78, died September 4, 2022, in Sparks, Nevada. He was born in Tonasket, Washington, on January 13, 1944. Beginning at age 8, he was raised by his mother's parents in Orient, Washington. His grandfather was a Border Patrol agent. Ron graduated from Kettle Falls High School in 1962 where his physical size boded well for his football endeavors.

Ron's USFS career began in 1963 when he manned the "First Thot Lookout" near Orient, WA, on the Colville N.F. In 1964 he rookied at NCSB where he jumped the 1964-65 seasons. He is remembered for his strength and dependability, a good jump partner.

Ron was fearless of heights and was a great jump partner as he would gladly climb for hung up cargo. This paid off in college when he would climb the radio tower for the local radio station in Wenatchee to change "light bulbs" for \$50. The tower was over 200 feet tall.

His fearlessness of heights served him well in his career as a "high climbing lineman" where he only accepted the highest and toughest projects.

Ron told of one incident near Hermiston, Oregon, where he and his crew were trapped during a winter storm with high winds at over 300 feet for four hours. He worked “hot” lines from high towers, crawling cables midair to make repairs. His lineman career began in 1966 and spanned 40 years. He retired in 2006. He was a 56-year, dues paying member of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW), and in retirement became active in training, development, and defending workers’ rights. He was highly respected by his co-workers and union leaders as a thoughtful, fair, firm, and inspiring leader. Ron is perhaps best remembered for his leadership when Nevada Power’s President abruptly announced the drastic cut in retiree’s medical benefits and refused to answer member’s questions. Ron fearlessly grabbed the microphone and called for a picket, the first in 60 years. This led to a two-year legal battle, with the union prevailing. The benefits were restored. Union leadership regard the battle as “transformative” with young members realizing the benefit of organizing.

A master woodworker, Ron taught classes in wood turning and produced exquisite pieces. He understood angles and accepted only precise pieces. His shop was/is the “holy grail” of wood shops, his work was perfection.

Today’s smokejumpers/wildland firefighters could use the likes of Ron Borst to carry their torch for acceptable pay, medical and pension benefits.

(Thanks to Ken Borg NCSB-64, for this obit. Ed.)

Donald Kirk Wahl (Missoula ’63)

Don died August 23, 2022, in Boise, Idaho. He was born in Fillmore, California, on January 13, 1942. Throughout the 60s, Don traveled the West as a young man seeking adventure with the railroad in Washington and Oregon, United Airlines in Seattle, and the silver mines of Kellogg, Idaho. He even tried his hand at copper mining in Butte, Montana, so he could stay close to Judy Thurston, his sweetheart, while she studied nursing at Montana State University in Bozeman. In 1964 Don joined the Marine Corp and served in the Marine Corp Reserves and Army Reserves until 1969.

Don found his true passion in 1961 as a

firefighter with the USFS and ultimately rose to the ranks as a smokejumper. On April 8th, 1967, Don married Judy, the love of his life, in Missoula. During the summer of 1970, they drove the Alaskan Canadian Highway north to Fairbanks, Alaska, to continue his passion for smokejumping with the BLM. They hadn’t planned to stay in Fairbanks long, but 30 years later they had grown in their professions, created a community of friends, and raised both of their daughters, Darcy and Trista, in the Land of the Midnight Sun.

Don retired as the Safety and Occupational Health Manager for the BLM in 1995, and in the summer of 2000, he and Judy moved to Germany to enjoy the next six years of their lives together during Judy’s work as an Occupational Health Nurse with the US Army.

In 2006 following Judy’s retirement, they moved back to the states to settle in Boise, Idaho. Don jumped at Missoula 1963-64, 67-69, Fairbanks 1965, 70-74, and Anchorage 1966. He was an NSA Life Member.

Tom Thomas (North Cascades ’62)

Tom died August 15, 2022, at his home in Summerville, Oregon. He was born December 19, 1943, in Tonasket, Washington. Tom grew up in the Methow Valley and graduated from Twisp H.S. and rookied at NCSB in 1962 where he jumped 1962-66, and 1972-76. Tom earned his Ph.D. in Microbiology from Eastern Washington University. While at EWU, he was drafted and spent two years in the Army and served in Vietnam.

Tom lived in La Grande, Oregon and worked for the USFS for many years until he retired. He was an avid hunter and packed into the high country using his horses Deek and Blue. Tom was an NSA Life Member.

Jan W. Van Wagtendonk (Cave Junction ’60)

Jan died July 15, 2022. He earned a bachelor’s in Forestry from Oregon State, a master’s in Range Management from the University of California, Berkeley, and a Ph.D. from UC Berkeley. Jan was a Captain in the Army from 1963-67 with the 101st Airborne and served in Vietnam. He was a research scientist for the National Park Service in Yosemite N.P. 1968-74 and held the same posi-

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tion with the US Geological Survey 1975-2001.

His areas of research included prescriptions for burning in wildland ecosystems, recreational impacts in wilderness, the application of geographic information systems to resources management, and the role of fire in Sierra Nevada ecosystems. Jan was one of the authors of the first federal fire policy in 1995. “Jan was a strong advocate for returning fire to the Sierra landscape. His pioneering use of prescribed fire in the early 1970s in and around the Mariposa Grove started us on the path to reestablishing an ecological balance lost in over 100 years of fire suppression,” the park service said.

Jan jumped at Cave Junction 1960-61 and at Fairbanks 1962. August 13, 1961, Jan (“Yoochan” in CJ language), and I jumped a fire on the Rogue N.F. He hung up way over 150 feet in a Doug Fir that was easily four foot in diameter at the base.

In later years, he would not admit it, but we cut down that tree to get his chute. C. Sheley

Charles Melvin “Chuck” Lockwood (Missoula ’65)

Chuck, 80, died July 29, 2022, in Hereford, Arizona. He was born August 24, 1941, in Lynn, Washington, and grew up in Ronan, Montana. Chuck jumped at Missoula 1965-66. He earned his bachelor’s from the University of Montana in 1972. In 1966 Chuck was injured in a car accident that left him physically impaired. He then went to work for Washington Corp. in Missoula and then on to Jore Corporation in Ronan, Montana.

Leo P. Compton (McCall ’47)

Leo, 96, died July 5, 2022, in Boise, Idaho. He was born in a farmhouse in Middle Water, Texas,

on February 5, 1926. The family moved to Kuna, Idaho, in the late 1930s. After graduating from high school in 1945, Leo enlisted in the Army during WWII and was assigned to the Army Air Corps where he was trained to be a B-17 pilot. After the war Leo enrolled at Boise Jr. College and played two years of football and baseball. Leo then received a football scholarship to Idaho State University and was captain of the 1950 team. He jumped at McCall in 1947 and got eight fire jumps. At Idaho City in 1948, Leo got two fire jumps.

Leo was injured on a fire jump in Idaho when his chute was collapsed by a tree, and he dislocated both ankles and a wrist. He had to wait 24 hours for a rescue team to jump in and carry him out.

Leo graduated from Idaho State University with a degree in education and returned to Kuna H.S. as a teacher and coach. In 1952 he moved to Oregon where he taught until 1964. He received his master's degree and went to Nampa, Idaho, as Athletic Director. In 1967 Leo moved to Boise and founded Image Building Advertising. In 1981 he started Eagle Publications until he retired in 1991. Leo then substitute taught at Bishop Kelly H.S. until he was 84.

Albert Charles Goldammer (Missoula '64)

Al died August 25, 2021. He was born April 23, 1943, in Douglas County, South Dakota. After high school, he earned a degree from Wartburg College and a Master of Divinity degree from Wartburg Seminary. He interned in Manhattan, N.Y. as a Worker Priest. Al took two mission trips to Nicaragua and Guatemala. His parishes included churches in many locations in South Dakota.

Al jumped at Missoula 1964-66. Prior to that he worked on Blister Rust in Idaho and a hotshot crew in Montana. He and his wife, Carolyn, traveled worldwide during his lifetime.

Ralph Rudolph Gregerson (McCall '50)

Ralph, 94, died April 4, 2022, in Santa Rosa, California. Ralph was born on October 30, 1927, in Pasadena, California. The family eventually moved to Boise, Idaho, where Ralph attended Boise High School. As a teenager, he would help refurbish broken cars and sell them. Ralph also

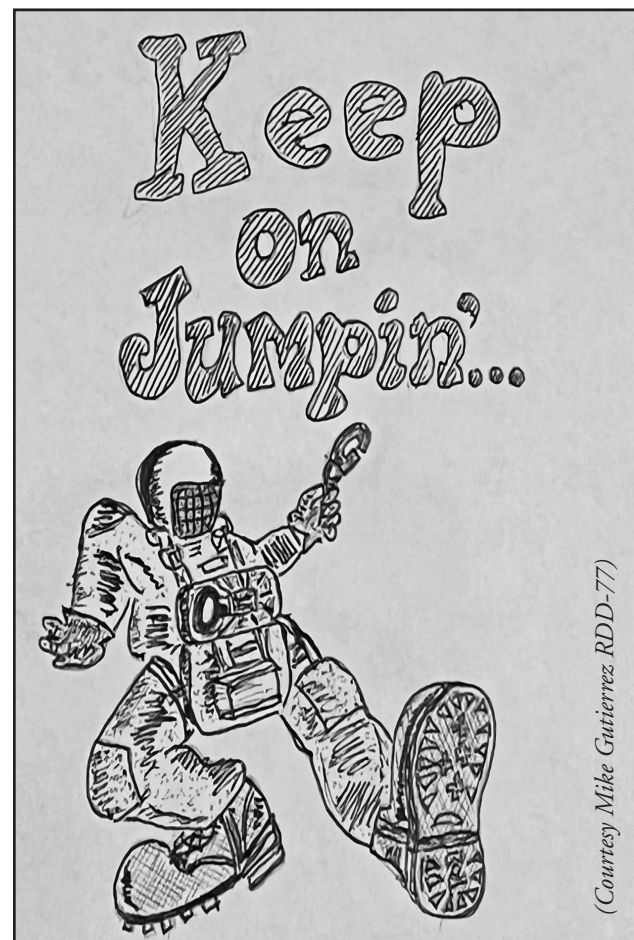
worked as a laborer for the Forest Service doing everything from clearing trails to stringing phone wire.

Ralph served in the Army for two years, spending time in Korea before the war. On returning, Ralph and Rudd built a cabin in McCall, Idaho, that became and is still the summer getaway of generations of Gregersons.

Ralph became a smokejumper in McCall, serving in the years 1950 and 1952. It was while living in McCall and serving as a smokejumper that Ralph met Verley Takkinen, who would become his bride on September 2, 1950.

Rudd had worked as a mechanic and passed those skills on to Ralph. Ralph carried those skills into his professional life and became an airplane mechanic. This eventually developed into a profession as a "flight engineer" - the third man in the cockpit - for Pan American Airways.

As a flight engineer, Ralph literally traveled the world including Africa, South America, Asia, the Middle East, and Europe. 🇺🇸



Not Forgotten

William “Bill” Martin (La Grande '79))

Bill was killed in a parachute training accident May 31, 1991, near the Missoula Smokejumper Base. Bill, 34, a squad leader was in his 12th smoke jumping season, amassing 234 jumps.

Bill and nine other experienced Forest Service Smokejumpers were training on Ram Air parachutes used by the BLM for an eventual transition from round parachutes. While very experienced on the static line round parachute used by Forest Service jumpers, he was essentially a rookie on the new square parachute. For unknown reasons, Bill never pulled his drogue release/main chute rip cord and did not deploy his reserve chute until too late to prevent his fatal impact with the ground.

Born in Moscow, Idaho, Bill graduated high school in Estacada, Oregon, and had attended Oregon State University and the University of Idaho. He began his fire career with the Forest Service in 1978, rookied at La Grande in 1979 and moved to Grangeville starting with the 1980 fire season. He was survived by his wife Kathleen.

Thomas J. Regennitter (Redding '67)

Tom, 26, died June 3, 1970, during a fire jump on the Oak Fire, Shasta Trinity NF, California. An employee of the Angeles NF with 33 jumps, he was a part of the Redding “Retread” program.

The following is from the recollections of **Larry Boggs** (RDD-63) and **Murry Taylor** (RDD-65) who were on the Oak Fire load.

After exiting the DC-3, Boggs said the spotter, Bob Kersh, observed Tom drifting to the southwest with his hands hanging at his side, not on the guidelines, then watched as suddenly his parachute turned 180 degrees and headed for the fire.

Taylor, who jumped the stick right before Tom, noted a new static line extension and procedure had been put into place shortly before this fire jump. Evidence pointed to the static line inadvertently crossing Tom's helmet and face mask, breaking his neck upon exiting.

Earl “Skip” Pike (RDD-68) saw that his jump partner was hurt and followed Tom's descent rather than steer to the jump spot. Tom came down just like angels were steering and wound up sitting upright at the base of a tree. Those who found him 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.

A native of Southern California, Tom was born in Montebello and was attending Pasadena City College at the time of the accident. **Rich Grandski** (RDD-64), good friend and fellow college student with Tom, noted, “Tom was a quiet guy with many great qualities. He was a hardworking and dedicated Forest Service employee who chose a career in what, at that time, we called fire control. There were no movies or books ever written about Tom Regennitter, and I expect that is the way he would have wanted it.”

Dale R Swedeen (Missoula '61)

Dale died May 1, 1992, due to complications of paralysis injuries. He broke his back, while making his first fire jump, when his parachute oscillated and he hit a rock on the Cochrane Gulch Fire, Helena NF, Montana on July 8, 1961. Rendered a paraplegic at age 22, Dale received care and rehabilitation treatment at the Rusk Institute in New York City and lived 30+ years with his injuries while confined to a wheelchair.

A native of Sioux Falls, South Dakota, Dale attended high school in Rapid City, South Dakota, then graduated from Kubasaki High School in Okinawa, Japan. Prior to the accident, he had attended South Dakota State University and the University of South Dakota where he had been a Radio/TV major. After the accident, in 1964, he moved to Florida where he completed his education, receiving a degree in Nursing Home Administration. He later moved to Mesa, Arizona, in 1989, where he owned a hair salon and died at the age of 53. 🕯

A Tribute To Fred Rohrbach

by Jerry DeBruin (Associate)

I met Fred in the summer of 1997 when I received his rather cryptic call. He introduced himself, then told me he was interested in the case of fellow smokejumper, my brother **Gene DeBruin** (MSO-59), a person he had never formally met.

At first, I was wary but felt more comfortable when he told me he frequently traveled to Southeast Asia and was willing to help our family gather information about Gene. It was a generous offer, but I needed to gather information about **Fred Rohrbach** (MSO-65) and learn whether he was genuine.

It is now 25 years after Fred's initial call. Fred has reached the milestone, his 80th birthday, Dec. 21 of 2022. Our DeBruin family wishes to extend our deepest, heartfelt gratitude to Fred for his dedicated time, tireless efforts, and generous financial resources expended in the search for Gene.

The CIA's operation in Laos ceased in 1975. Fred embarked on the quest to learn about Gene's fate and whereabouts in 1997. There were 101 smokejumpers recognized by the CIA in 2022 for their service in Southeast Asia. I received a thought-provoking scroll from the CIA in January 2022. On the scroll were the names of 101 smokejumpers who assisted "The Agency" in operations in Southeast Asia.

Sometime later, after careful research, I selected from the scroll the names of 32 smokejumpers who were most active in the search for Gene. Fred Rohrbach emerged much later but is deserving of such honor.

Fred is a trusted friend. He is a tenacious ally, using shake-'n'-bake, living-on-the-edge tactics to achieve the goal of finding Gene. He is a well-traveled businessman and has made many worldwide contacts and dealings, most noteworthy in timber.

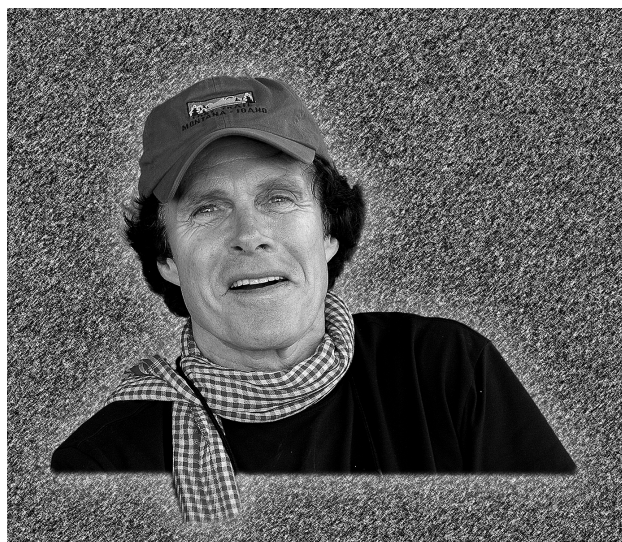
Most important is Fred as a person. He is a tough, physically fit individual – qualities ingrained in him from his former military and smokejumper training. He is a caring family man and is empathic with his employees and their concerns.

After some time elapsed, Fred shared more of his experiences with me. He was at Fort Benning for three weeks of Army training, then served in Vietnam for almost a year. Three M-16 machine guns were his downfall. He broke his neck, his head nestled between two sandbags. A chopper picked him up and took him to a hospital where he spent four months in traction. The proud, once physically fit Fred saw his muscles atrophy, but he did return to amass the noteworthy feats that adorn his impeccable resume.

Words fall far short when expressing the degree to which Fred has affected our family. He has sacrificed his mind and body in planning, then chasing down every domestic and international lead in an attempt to gain information about Gene. Using his "down-and-dirty," hands-on methods, Fred has engaged in overt and covert strategies to reach the elusive goal.

On the CIA's scroll, Gene is listed as MIA.

Our 25-year friendship with Fred Rohrbach remains intact. Cemented in concrete is our family's heartfelt message of gratitude for all that you, Fred, have done for our Family. Happy 80th birthday. Your mind-muscle remains strong. May you have many more productive years. 🙏



Fred Rohrbach. (NSA File)