



THE NATIONAL SMOKEJUMPER
ASSOCIATION

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JULY 2023

SMOKEJUMPER

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Message from the President



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

IT IS MID-APRIL in Utah. We are currently experiencing threat of floods due to the record snowpack. The mountains above remain covered in snow, up to 20 feet and more. Of course, we've all seen the news coverage of the epic snowfall in the mountains of California where even ski lifts were buried.

All this snow will provide some welcome relief to the extreme drought conditions in the West. It will add water to Lake Mead and reservoirs like Lake Shasta. Locally, I hope to see Salt Lake come up a few feet.

Unfortunately, that relief is likely to be short-lived. The long-term projection is for continued climate change. In fact, scientists tell us that extreme weather events we've been experiencing across the country are likely consistent with a changing climate. In an introduction to its publication, "Explaining Extreme

Events of 2021 and 2022 from a Climate Perspective," the American Meteorological Association put it this way: "This BAMS special report presents assessments of how human-caused climate change may have affected the strength and likelihood of extreme events." <https://tinyurl.com/yc4k2524>. Out of concern for what climate change portends for our forests and wildlands, last June the US Secretary of Agriculture released a memorandum directing the Forest Service to "...take bold actions to restore forests, improve resilience, and address the climate crisis." <https://tinyurl.com/4b833w98>.

In response, the Forest Service released its Climate Adaptation Plan July 2022. According to the plan, it "...presents a comprehensive approach to integrating climate change adaptation into the Forest Service's operations and mission." This plan outlines key climate risks to the agency's operations and critical adaptation actions to reduce these risks and help ensure the Forest Service continues to meet the needs of present and future generations. It builds on the strong foundation of decades of Forest Service research on climate change impacts and adaptation and over a decade of effort in climate adaptation decision support, planning

Continued on page 4

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.*)

Having Your Correct Email Addresses Is Very Important

In order to save the NSA time and money, Chuck Sheley is sending renewals and the merchandise flyer via email. Sending via email is a good cost-efficient move.

To see if we have your correct email address, go to the NSA website at www.smokejumpers.com. Click on "News and Events" at the top of the page. Click on "Jump List" on the pulldown, type in your *last* name.

Please contact Chuck if we need to update your email. His contact information is on this page.

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Smokejumper base abbreviations:

Anchorage.....ANC	GrangevilleGAC	MissoulaMSO
Boise.....NIFC	Idaho CityIDC	Redding.....RDD
Cave Junction.....CJ	La Grande.....LGD	Redmond.....RAC
Fairbanks.....FBX	McCall.....MYC	West Yellowstone WYS
		Winthrop.....NCSB

Get *Smokejumper* One Month Earlier

Many NSA members are switching to the digital version of *Smokejumper* delivered by email instead of the printed edition. It is sent as a PDF identical to the hard copy issue.

Advantages include early delivery (a month ahead of USPS), ease of storage, and NSA postal expense savings.

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. 📧

application, and on-the-ground actions.” <https://tinyurl.com/ye286t6x>.

Subsequently, in February 2023, the National Association of Forest Service Retirees (NAFSR) published a position statement in support of the Forest Service Climate Adaptation Plan.

“NAFSR supports the purposes and actions outlined in the USDA Secretary’s Memorandum (June 2022) and believes that the six adaptation actions outlined in the USDA Forest Service’s Climate Adaptation Plan (July 2022) respond well to the Memorandum and deserve widespread

support by the public and elected officials. Better, broader partnerships and alliances will help in addressing climate change effects.” <https://tinyurl.com/35muvfrn>.

Accompanying its position paper, NAFSR also published a “Climate Change Science Statement” providing the scientific rationale for its Climate Change Position Statements. <https://tinyurl.com/2p9axhpy>. We love the forests and wildlands! That is a reason most of us gravitated to smoke-jumping. We are concerned about our forests and wildlands, especially given the backdrop of extensive drought and mega fires that are now the norm. 🔑

Denali, The Great One—An Early Ascent of North America’s Highest Peak

by Walt Venum (Fairbanks ’62)

My first glimpse of Denali (elevation 20,310 feet) was through a dirty Plexiglas window on a Bureau of Land Management DC-3 flying between Anchorage and Fairbanks during April 1962. It’s big! No, it’s awe-inspiring enormous. It also looked very snowy and extremely cold.

At the time I had no mountaineering background, so I snapped a few photos, scribbled some notes for my diary, and filed the scene away in my memory.

I climbed Mt. Owen in the Tetons, in Wyoming, two years later with an experienced climber I’d met in a physics class at the University of Montana. We’d gotten on well together, and that fall he invited me on a winter ascent of Granite Peak in Montana’s Beartooth Mountains, the highest point in the state.

Granite Peak (elevation 12,799 feet) is light years into the backcountry and in mid-winter, a no fun-in-the-sun Teton rock climb. I was in way over my head, incredibly cold, and at times more than just a little scared. That trip, however, was good training for what came next.

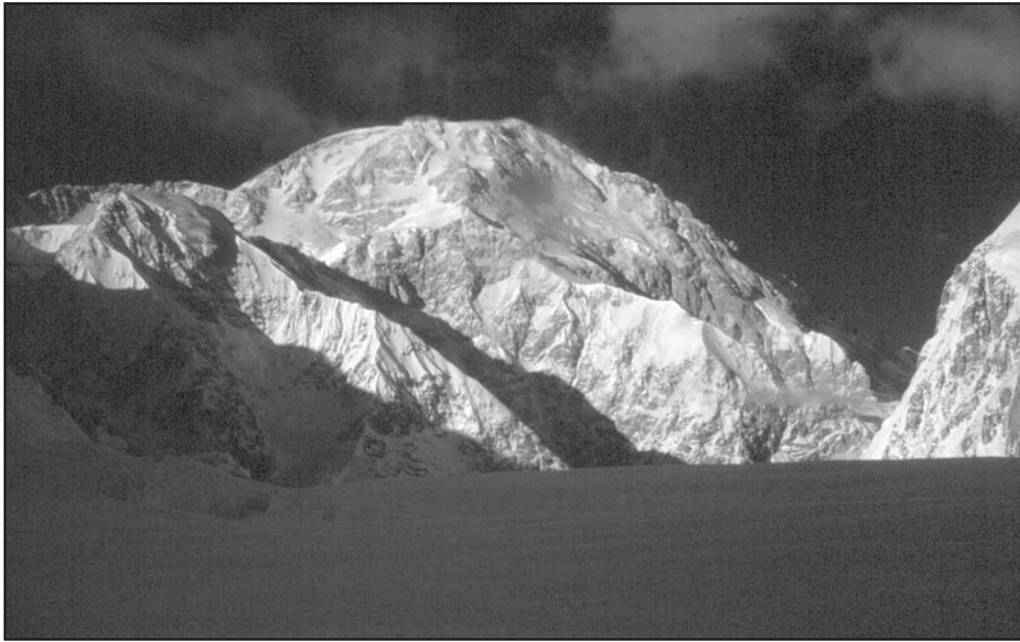
One of the other members of our Granite Peak party was Hank Noldan, a career BLM employee

then living in Dillon, Montana. Noldan transferred to BLM’s Fairbanks office in 1968 and a year later asked me along on an expedition to Denali’s west buttress.

Although the truth has probably been embellished considerably over the past 113 years, the first ascent of Denali’s lower North Peak (elevation 19,470 feet) was almost certainly made April 3, 1910, by two Alaskan prospectors as the result of a wager placed in a Fairbanks saloon. The higher South Peak, the true summit of the mountain, was not attained until three years later.

Appropriately enough, the first person to step onto the “Roof of North America” was Walter Harper, an Alaskan-born Native American. Denali was not climbed again until the early 1930s, and by 1950 the South Peak had been reached only six times. All these climbs had begun with a long, extremely arduous approach from Wonder Lake in the Kantishna area north of the mountain.

After fording the hazardous McKinley River, those masochistic individuals slogged for endless miles across mosquito-ravaged, swampy tundra before scrambling over McGonagall Pass and descending onto the Muldrow Glacier, still almost three vertical miles below the summit.



South Face of Denali (Courtesy W. Vennum)

Well-known Alaskan climber/photographer/cartographer Bradford Washburn, later director of the Boston Museum of Science, pioneered a new route up the west buttress in 1951. If there is such a thing as an easy way up a mountain as big, high, cold, and dangerous as Denali, the west buttress qualifies.

Anyone who can do an ice ax self-arrest, knows crevasse rescue techniques, can climb 50-degree ice wearing crampons, and has some winter climbing or camping experience has the necessary technical skills. The requisite stamina, tenacity, and good luck with the weather are the same anywhere on the peak whether you're on the West Buttress, the Slovak Direct, or the Isis Face.

The most strenuous part of now approaching Denali from the south is bending your elbow multiple times while sitting at one of the bars in Talkeetna waiting for weather decent enough to fly into the mountain.

Noldan, four others, and I flew from Talkeetna to 7,400 feet on the Southeast Fork of the Kahiltna Glacier June 6, 1969. From there everything, including us, went downhill rapidly.

After descending 400 feet to the main Kahiltna Glacier we spent the next few days shuttling all our gear several miles up the glacier to its head just below Kahiltna Pass at 10,000 feet. We arrived with the last of our loads simultaneously with the onset of a major storm.

Like a group of ice moles, we burrowed our way into the bergschrund beneath the pass, set up our tents on what we hoped was a bomb-proof snow bridge and slept for three days.

After shoveling our way out of the schrund, each of us spent the next two days carrying loads up Motorcycle Hill, around well-named Windy Corner and eventually into a small basin at 14,200 feet.

Since none of us had ever been that high before and were not yet well-acclimatized, carrying 75—90-pound packs up more than 4,000 vertical feet on each of two consecutive days made the rookie smokejumper pack test seem like the Teddy Bear's picnic.

Good weather continued the following day. So, instead of taking well-deserved time off for rest and mandatory "altitude adjustment," like most experienced climbers would have done, we decided to do a carry up to the crest of the west buttress at 15,600 feet, then return to our camp in the basin. The West Buttress headwall was the technical crux of our entire climb – 800 vertical feet of 50-degree ice. We belayed this section of quite strenuous and, for us, slow climbing. The Park Service now maintains a permanent set of fixed ropes there. The ropes make the headwall safer, faster, and far less demanding physically, but many "old school" climbers feel that using them is cheating.

Once on top of the buttress, all of us finally began to feel we really were up high on a big mountain. The other two giant peaks of the central Alaska Range, Foraker (17,400 feet) and Hunter (14,573 feet), were now visible as was the full length of the Kahiltna Glacier.

The apex of the buttress, although not especially narrow, drops off steeply on both sides, imparting a mild sense of exposure. Since every-

one felt well, we kept moving up the ridge to a small plateau at 17,200 feet. Arriving late in the day, there was just enough time to enlarge a pre-existing snow cave into a palatial accommodation before yet another storm slammed into the mountain.

Thirty-six hours later, pounding, screaming headaches woke everyone to a day of marginal weather. Four of us decided to go for it. From our snow cave, an ascending traverse—the Autobahn—climbed up and across a moderately steep bowl of iron-hard, wind-blasted snow to a low ridge several hundred feet above Denali Pass, the notch between the North and South peaks. A short distance farther along this ridge blended into “the Football Field,” a gently rising slope that eventually merges with the noticeably steeper summit scarp.

By now we were totally immersed in thick fog, wandering around like little lost children inside a white beach ball, trying to follow a compass heading.

Supposedly you can see 100,000 square miles of Alaska from the summit of Denali. We knew we were on top only when a break in the clouds revealed a small, tattered American flag attached to a slender bamboo pole. It was 10 p.m., June 17, the temperature was 11 degrees Fahrenheit, the wind calm. We could see approximately 100 square feet. At 1 a.m., 16 hours after leaving our snow cave, we went into an open bivouac (no tent or sleeping bags) for several hours in a pile of frost shattered granite just under 19,000 feet. We were back in Talkeetna three days later, once more bending our elbows at the Fairview Inn.

Despite foolishly rushing up the mountain without proper acclimatization—comparable to barfing into your face mask on your first fire jump—we made the 69th ascent of the mountain. Those of us who topped out were the 327th through 330th individuals to do so. At least three other smokejumpers, all who worked in Alaska, have followed in our footsteps: **Carl Neufelder** (MSO-54), **Tom Boatner** (FBX-80) and **Bruce Nelson** (FBX-81).

While on the mountain, we encountered only two other parties, both of which were descending after successful summit bids. Between 1,000 and

1,200 people have attempted to climb Denali every year since 1980; slightly more than half make it to the top and more than 90 percent go via the west buttress. One third of all these climbers pay \$8,000 to \$10,000 to a commercial guiding company.

The Park Service now maintains a summer long “base camp” complete with camp manager, weather forecaster/radio operator, and rescue team at the Kahiltna Glacier landing strip and a smaller but similar facility in the 14,200-foot basin. Climbing Denali now requires a 60 days’ pre-registration for the privilege period for purchasing a \$395-per-person permit—and don’t forget the extra \$15 Denali National Park entry fee!—followed by a mandatory pre-climb orientation session in Talkeetna.

Porta-potties are in place at several of the more popular West Buttress campsites and teams are now required to carry portable toilets (euphemistically called “Clean Mountain cans”) with them everywhere on the mountain.

Climbing Denali is still a worthwhile endeavor and for many who are successful, it will be a lifetime achievement. Most of the carnival atmosphere that now pervades the mountain can be avoided by sliding your neck farther out onto the chopping block and attempting the South Buttress or West Rib.

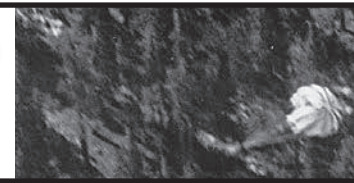
The Cassin Ridge is regarded as one of the finest alpine climbs on this planet, but you’d better have your Boy Scout mountaineering merit badge requirements well in hand before even considering venturing onto it. It’s not a trivial exercise.

Despite all the modern conveniences, the mountain is no less hostile now than it was in 1910. Pulmonary and cerebral edema falls on snow, ice or into crevasses, avalanches, sudden violent storms, cardiac arrest, hypothermia, and exhaustion have taken a toll of over 100 lives since the first death in the 1930s. More than a handful of these casualties have been Europeans or East Asians who have sadly underestimated the mountain and discovered far too late that it is virtually impossible to do a self-arrest with a trekking pole after falling while descending either the Autobahn or a cynical, macabre-named couloir called the Orient Express. 🗡️



THE JUMP LIST

The Men of 1957



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 have more bios but am only doing NSA members this time.

Thomas W. “Tom” Hodges (Grangeville '54)

Tom was born October 2, 1932, in Binghamton, N.Y., where he grew up and graduated from high school in 1952.

“I attended the New York State Ranger School, which is now State University of New York (SUNY), College of Environmental Science and Forestry Ranger School and successfully completed the course of study (not a degree program at that time). I then transferred to the SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry (ESF). I spent the summer of 1954 as a Smokejumper. In 1956, I graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree. While at the Ranger School, three of my classmates ultimately served with the smokejumpers. They are **Art Flick** (MSO 53), **John Richardson** (IDC-55), and **Lee Bender** (GAC-57).

“In 1956, I was drafted into the Army and served for two years with a NIKE Antiaircraft Missile Battery on Long Island,

NY, where I carried out the duties of Supply Sergeant. I was honorably discharged in 1958.

“I worked in Binghamton, NY, a short time with the Broome County Highway Department Engineering Crew as surveyor. I then spent 2 years with the NYS Dept. of Environmental Conservation serving as a forester. In 1960, I was hired by IBM as a Product Development Engineer. I continued employment with IBM for the next 30 years and was manager of a Major Product Procurement Department until I retired in 1990.

“I currently reside in Vestal, NY, in the same home where my wife, Sylvia, and I raised three sons and one daughter.

“In this year of 2021 and at the age of 88, I continue to keep active, especially with a rural property where I carry out forestry improvements. On October 10, 2020, I climbed one of the high peaks in the Adirondacks (northern part of NY) with my son Jim and daughter, Judy. We hiked 9.6 miles and climbed 2200 feet, and I'm happy to say that I made it, however not without some pulling and pushing on the part of Judy and Jim. Who said we are too old!”

Harold J. Hoem (Missoula '57)

Harold was born July 10, 1937, in Butte, Montana,

where he grew up and graduated from Butte HS in 1955. He furthered his education at the Univ. of Montana, Univ. of Minnesota, Univ. of Innsbruck, and received a bachelor's from the Univ. of Washington in 1960.

Military Service: Special Agent of Office of Naval Intelligence, Seattle, WA; Special Agent in Charge of Yokohama, Japan, Office 1964-1967; Chief Counterintelligence Officer, Saigon, 1967-1968.

He traveled extensively throughout Nepal, India, Pakistan, Scotland, Africa, taught at Athens College 1968-1969, and returned to USA in 1971.

Owned and operated a commercial fishing boat 1972-95, fishing for albacore off Pacific Coast, and halibut in Southeast Alaska and the Bering Sea. Lived in Methow Valley, Washington State, and retired to Missoula in 1995.

Personal comments: Published a climate change quarterly for several years and am still active on this issue. Worked with fire scientists on home-ignition zone awareness. Worked on several trail projects after retirement.

Harold jumped at Missoula 1957-59.

James Mulford “Jim” Hutchinson

(Missoula '57)

Jim was born January 21,

1937, in Ft. Defiance, Arizona, and went to grade school and high school in Arlington, Virginia, where he graduated from Washington-Lee H.S. in 1955. He graduated from the University of Montana in 1960 with a degree in Wildlife Biology. Jim started working with the USFS in 1956 as a lookout and jumped at Missoula 1957-58. He was in the Army Reserves from 1961-67.

He worked at various race-tracks in California exercising racehorses 1964-65. Then 1965-69 he worked for the Los Angeles Zoo as a Senior Animal Keeper, and 1969-72 as a Senior Wilderness Ranger on the Teton NF. Jim was self-employed 1974-2000 when he retired. He volunteered on the NSA Trail Crew Program 2001-04 and was a volunteer campground host on the Bitterroot NF. Jim then spent nine seasons as a lookout on the Nez Perce NF 2006-15. He currently (2022) lives in Missoula, Montana.

Gene L. “Gino” Jessup (North Cascades '57)

“I was born in Wenatchee, Washington, on October 25, 1937, where I grew up and graduated from Wenatchee HS in 1955. I attended Wenatchee Junior College in 1955-56 and 1958, attended University of Montana in 1959, and graduated from U of Montana many years later in 1994.

“Due to family exemption, I missed being drafted in 1962 and worked in the fruit industry for many years and retired

from my Alcohol and Drug Counseling Agency in 2013.

“I live in Malaga, Washington, with my wife, LaNita. When not fishing the small lake, which is 60 feet from our back door, we will be bass fishing in Washington and Idaho. I write books and have my fourth book now in the publishing process.

“I self-published a book for my smokejumping friends of the 1956-60 era and have partnered with Bill Moody on a few literary projects. My brother and I were asked by Bill to be speakers at a couple of our NCSB reunions. It was a fantastic and wonderful honor. As with most of the Smokejumper Brotherhood, my days as a smokejumper defines me as the man I am today. Life is good, all is well, and it is as it should be.” Gino jumped at NCSB 1957-60

Fredrick W. “Fritz” Koepf (Redding '57)

Fritz was born November 10, 1938, in Rice Lake, Wisconsin, where he grew up on a dairy farm ten miles from Rice Lake. He graduated from Rice Lake H.S. in 1956 and furthered his education with a bachelor's in Forest Management from the University of Minnesota in 1960. Fritz was in the USAF Reserve Pararescue for six years.

His work career: Forester, Forestry and Water Rights Agent, Fire Ecologist, Real Properties Agent; numerous locations: Big Bar, CA, Pasadena CA, Los Angeles, CA, Shaver Lake, CA, Rosemead,

CA, Anchorage, AK, and Fullerton, CA.

Fritz jumped at Redding 1957-58 and was one of the original crew that started the base in 1957.

Vernon Lattin (Redding '57)

Vern was born November 7, 1938, in Winslow, Arizona. He moved to Albuquerque, New Mexico, at age nine and graduated from Highland H.S. in 1956. Vern continued his education with a bachelor's and a master's from the University of New Mexico, followed by a Ph.D. in English from the University of Colorado in 1970.

His professional career included academic professorships at the Univ. of Tennessee, Northern Illinois Univ., the University of Wisconsin, Arizona State University, and Brooklyn College (City Univ. of New York). He was also a University administrator: Assoc. V.P. for Academic Affairs Univ. of Wisconsin System (1982-88), V.P. and Provost Arizona State Univ. (1988-92), and President Brooklyn College (1992-2000).

“I became a smokejumper by chance and circumstances in 1957. While talking with a friend, the friend suggested applying to the Forest Service for a jumper position. At the time, I had never even flown in an airplane, not dreamt of jumping out. In fact, I jumped out of an airplane six times before having the pleasure of actually landing in one. During my short career, I had the good

fortune of being entangled with another jumper's chute, falling a good distance out of a tree, and having the opportunity of getting all the crew lost while walking out from a fire.

"I am currently retired, living the easy life in the village of Corrales, N.M., with my wife, Patricia Hopkins Lattin. We have four children and more than a dozen grandchildren. My memories of friends and jumping continue as a warm thought to the day, sixty-three years beyond my last jump." Vern jumped at Redding 1957-59.

Gary G. Lawley
(Missoula '57)

Gary was born September 19, 1937, in Tishomingo, Oklahoma, and moved to California in the late 1930s before returning to Oklahoma. He went to East Central University in Ada, Oklahoma, on a full football scholarship where he played in every game for four years and was an All-Conference receiver. He jumped at Missoula 1957-58 paying his way through college. Gary got his master's at East Central and his Ph.D. in Aquatic Ecology at North Texas University and did post-doctoral work at U.C. Berkeley.

Gary's work career is extensive and varied. He was Head Basketball Coach at Amarillo H.S. for several years and was once selected the "Basketball Coach of the Year" in Texas. He was Program Manager for several nuclear power plants (NY), managed environmental studies Susitna Hydro Proj-

ect (AK), adjunct professor Univ. Alaska, extensive work in villages in Alaska, Lead Responder major spills (AK), Hazmat expert (overseas), worked 3-Mile Island, Mt. St. Helens eruption, desalination plant protection Saudi Arabia, among others.

Gary is now retired and spends winters in Oklahoma and summers in Alaska. He has worked on the NSA Trail Crews for 11 years and is a Life Member of the NSA.

Michael N. "Mike" Martin
(Grangeville '57)

Mike was born in Tullahoma, Tennessee, on September 27, 1937. He joined the Tennessee National Guard in 1956 before his smokejumper rookie year in 1957. After the season, Mike enlisted in the Army in October of 1957 and retired in June of 1986. He served tours in Germany, Korea, and two combat tours in Vietnam. During his time in Vietnam, he was an advisor to two Vietnamese Ranger Battalions and commander of a provincial reconnaissance unit. Mike rose to the rank of Command Sergeant Major (CSM) and had assignments with the 82nd and 101st Airborne and Army Ranger Departments. He received numerous medals and awards including three Bronze Stars, The Legion of Merit, and five awards of the Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry.

In 1994 he was inducted into the Army Ranger Hall of Fame for his contributions to the Army for more than 30 years. Mike authored "Angels

in Red Hats," a book about the Vietnamese Airborne Forces. He and his wife, Hildegard, live in Tullahoma, Tennessee.

John R. McDaniel
(Cave Junction '57)

John was born September 12, 1936, in Washington, Pennsylvania. He grew up in Grafton, W. Virginia where he went to high school before graduating from Schenley H.S. in Pittsburgh, PA. He earned his bachelor's in Forestry from the University of West Virginia in 1960 and later received a master's in International Studies from the Naval War College in 1983. John was in the Pennsylvania Air National Guard 1951-57 before starting an extensive career with the US Navy 1962-84 as a Naval Aviator. John is an NSA Life Member and was NSA Membership Chairman for 15 years.

His extensive and interesting bio can be found in the January 2021 issue of *Smokejumper* magazine. In referring to his two seasons at Cave Junction, John says, "I very much miss the Gobi and the work there. Best job I ever had."

Jack A. McKay
(North Cascades '57)

Jack was born April 23, 1938, in Vancouver, BC, and grew up in Seattle, Washington, where he graduated from Lincoln H.S. in 1957. He furthered his education with a bachelor's in Central Washington University in 1961, a master's from Central Washington in 1965, and an

Ed.D. from Washington State University in 1974. Jacked jumped at NCSB 1957-60 and 1962. He started his career in education as a teacher/coach at Port Angeles H.S. 1961-66, Principal at Ritzville and Pasco H.S. 1967-72, and Superintendent of Schools of the Sequim and Selah School Districts. Jack was Professor/Dept. Chair University Pacific (CA) 1986-90, the University of Nebraska (Omaha) 1990-94, and Associate Dean College of Education Central Washington University 1994-2023. He was Executive Director of The Horace Mann League of the USA 1994-2023.

William D. “Bill” Moody
(North Cascades '57)

“I was born June 3, 1939, in Bellingham, Washington, but soon moved to Anacortes, Washington, during the WWII years. From there I moved to Everett, Washington, from 1945 to 1951, then to

Seattle, Washington, through my junior and senior high school years. A week and a half after graduating from Lincoln High School (Seattle) in 1957, I started rookie jump training at NCSB.

“I attended the University of Washington, Seattle, during the 1957-58 school year. In 1958 a couple of us NCSB jumpers decided to attend Central Washington University in Ellensburg, Washington. From 1958-61, I attended Central, graduating with a bachelor’s degree in Geography. I immediately got a teaching and football/track coaching position at Pioneer Jr. High in Wenatchee, Washington (1961-1964). In 1964-65 I returned to Central Washington University, graduating in 1965 with master’s in Social Science. Upon completing my master’s, I returned to Pioneer Jr. High for a year before moving up to Wenatchee HS from 1966-1969 as a Contemporary

World Problems teacher and junior varsity football and varsity track coach (quarter-mile distance runners). Summers were reserved for smokejumping.”

Other Employment: “My junior High years were spent working in my parent’s dry cleaners, bagging groceries in the local Food Giant and spending summers working on my uncle’s ranch near Bozeman, Montana. During the summer of 1956, between my junior and senior year of high school, my foster brother and I ventured to Crescent, Oregon, where we worked in a ‘gypo’ sawmill pulling green chain. Luckily, there were two openings on the Crescent Ranger District, Deschutes NF fire/tree pruning crew. By ‘misrepresenting’ my age I was hired on the fire crew as a Laborer.”

Smokejumping: “As mentioned, I rookied at NCSB in 1957 and became a Supervisory

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- Tom Carlsen Film on Smokejumping (1939)
- Triple Nickle Photographs from the National Archives

Smokejumper in 1961, Smokejumper Training Foreman in 1969, and Smokejumper Base Manager in 1972. During my career I made 615 jumps from 25 different jump aircraft—208 fire jumps, 31 pararescue/search jumps and 20 Ram Air training jumps. Two Trimotor jumps were made for the 60 Year documentary, *Firefighters From the Sky*.

For several years I served as a member/chairman of the SASEB (Smokejumper Aircraft Screening and Evaluation Board)."

Aviation Quals/Positions: "While a jumper I was a qualified ATGS (Air Tactical Group Supervisor), Air Operations Branch Director and Type 3 IC. From 1991 to 2016, I was an AD ATGS on the Okanogan-Wenatchee NF, serving on several Type 1 and 2 IMTs.

"From 2004-2018 one of my more interesting jobs was with the VLAT/747 Supertanker program where I served as air tactical operations instructor, 747 fire operations

specialist, and international marketing from 2004-2018. I served as Chief of Operations 2018-2019. The program operated out of Colorado Springs, Colorado, and McClellan, California. Super-tanker assignments included fire operations in California, Oregon, Northern Mexico, Israel, Chile, and Bolivia. Since retiring in 2018, I work as a consultant for the 747 Supertanker program."

Fire-Aviation Instructor/Consultant: "In the early 1990s, I formed my own company, North Cascades Fire Service. I specialized in ICS fire and aviation courses plus an Air Tactical Operations course for the Colville and Yakama BIA/Confederated Tribes, Minnesota DNR/Superior NF, and Washington DNR.

"In 1998 I was hired as a Fire Operations Instructor for the Mongolian Integrated Fire Management Program—managed by the German Agency For Technical Assistance (GTZ). Assignments included

six six-week tours, 1998-2000, instructing basic firefighter/ICS, crew boss, misc. short courses."

Retirement: "Retirement has been a multi-career event from teaching in 1969 to going to work full-time at NCSB, from Smokejumper Base Manager in December 1989, from ATGS assignments in 2016, and from full-time 747 Supertanker program Chief of Operations 2018. I currently live in the Methow Valley, Twisp, Washington"

Professional Highlights: "Professional highlights: 30-day US-USSR Scientific/Technical Exchange to Soviet Union, two jumps from an An-2 with Russian jumpers in East Siberia, Smokejumper program presentation at the Smithsonian Air Space Museum with Francis Lufkin in 1983, six details to Mongolia to train Mongolian firefighters 1989-2000, recipient of 2020 Walt Duran Aerial Firefighter Safety Award, Life Member NSA." 🧑

Motorcycles Are Not Approved For Packouts

by Roger Cox (Missoula '69)

I jumped for 14 seasons and had many interesting experiences in my career. It was only fitting that my last fire jump would be unique, in that nothing is ever normal in smokejumping.

Fire weather in any one area is not constant from year to year. But there always seems to be one region that has an active fire season. The

smokejumper system is very flexible, and jumpers from any base can work with equal efficiency in any other region. This year the active jump base was McCall, Idaho.

I had jumped out of McCall in the past, but this season was different. It seemed that every jumper in the country was there and had been

there for weeks. I had already made a number of jumps out of McCall.

When the fire call came, it was early afternoon. I was paired up with **Jim Hedges** (MYC-78) and I couldn't have asked for a better jump partner. We were both veteran jumpers and had worked together many times.

We boarded the Otter and took off in the direction of the Salmon River. The Salmon River area is not necessarily friendly jump country, but we had done it before and this time would be no different.

But it was different; soon we were circling a smoking snag on the side of a forest road miles from the Salmon. It was obviously a sheep herder fire as the area was filled with sheep. A small, green meadow was behind the snag. This was too good to be true.

The streamers showed no wind, to put the final touches on the perfect fire. We hooked up and were soon standing in the meadow, amazed at our assignment. Well, there was more to come.

I left my chute where it lay and walked over to the cargo dropped neatly on the road. Jim and I broke out the Pulaskis and started to work on putting in a line around the snag. The fire was just smoldering at the base of the snag.

Before we could start work, seven motorcycles came roaring up the road. They had seen us jump and couldn't wait to see the action. These were older bikers, four guys and three gals. And they dressed the part.

I didn't really know what to expect. I never had an audience like this before. But they were so excited and enthusiastic we stopped work and started answering questions.

After discussing the experience of parachuting into fires, the discussion turned to fire control. How do you put out a fire? This fire was not a challenge; in fact, it was a little embarrassing but we could still demonstrate the basics of fireline construction.

It wasn't long until the fireline was completed but not by Jim nor me. In explaining how we lined the fire, two of the men grabbed the Pulaskis and started digging. Jim and I became the line bosses. Only trouble was we didn't have enough tools for our new crew. But they shared, which solved that problem.

I never realized how much fun could be had just digging line, but they dug with the energy of rookies.

Then it was time to drop the snag, so out came the crosscut. With cheers of enthusiasm, Jim and I forfeited our place on the saw and instead supervised crosscut training and snag dropping to our crew of seven.

The snag was several feet thick, and solid – perfect for training. They felled it right along the road and inside the fireline. I thought of the story told by Mark Twain about whitewashing a fence and how Huckleberry Finn got his friends to do his work.

With the snag on the ground, even bucked once and rolled out of the fire line, we were done fighting fire. Now we retrieved our gear. Again, it was Jim and I giving instructions on how to chain lines and stuff parachutes, but we did pack our own fire pack – the only work we did on the fire.

Now it was time to call for a pick up and head for home. As I started to call the district, one of the bikers offered us a ride. I didn't understand how that would work. He said two of them could put on the packs and Jim and I could ride double with the other two. I did not relish riding with big momma, but what the heck.

So, I called the district declared the fire out and said we had a ride back to the station. It got quiet for a minute or two and then the dispatcher inquired as to the source of our ride.

I thought about it for a few seconds and then simply said, "Motorcycles." I couldn't think of anything else to say, and after all, "honesty is the best policy."

Again, it got quiet for a minute or two. Then dispatch came back with, "If you didn't jump with it, don't get on it." In other words, "Motorcycles are not approved for packouts."

Our newly made friends and firefighting comrades were disappointed but they understood. They climbed onto their bikes and, with big smiles and dirty hands, roared down the road. We waited for the pick up.

Although I didn't know it at the time, it was my last fire jump for the Forest Service. It was a wonderful adventure, and the last jump was a fitting ending. 🦉

Randy Hurst

by Jeff R. Davis (Missoula '57)

Randy (MSO-54) was one of the most interesting characters I met in the smoke-jumpers, among a real array of interesting characters. I was sorry to learn of his death when it happened. I've got several stories about Randy that bear telling.

One of the funniest ones first: Randy was a pretty excitable guy. Like the time he spotted those of us returning to the New Mexico crew on O'Brien Ridge for a refresher jump. He'd tried to make squadleader for several years, but one of the requirements was to be qualified as a spotter. So far, he'd failed. This early spring, he was trying it again.

I was aboard a DC-3 with fifteen other jumpers on the way to O'Brien Ridge. I was first up, and I watched Randy closely. I wasn't about to be his "wind dummy." But he seemed to be doing OK as he dropped his first set of streamers over the ridge at 1200 feet. The streamers hit close to the spot on the second set. The jump was on.

I exited and made my uneventful way to the spot. The jump was easy. I landed only a couple of yards from the spot. I removed my helmet and looked upwards as the Doug came over on its next pass, but it flew right past the spot, and nothing. No jumpers. It flew around again, and the same thing happened. I wondered what the hell had happened. None of us on the ground could figure out why the dry runs.

Finally, two guys jumped out. When they landed, I ran over to the first one. "What the hell's going on up there?"

"Shit, Jeff, you wouldn't believe it up there! Randy was doing OK when he dropped you guys, but he got so damn excited watching you hit the spot, he hit the fire bottle and blew foam all over the deck!" Each jumper aircraft carried a fire extinguisher aft of the door, and Randy had somehow triggered the thing in his excitement. The foam sprayed all over the deck near the door, and he was unable to continue the run until the slick stuff was removed. "You wouldn't f----- believe it, Davis" The jumper was repeating himself. "That whole f----- Doug's awash in foam. Randy's covered clear to his knees! And everyone's slidin' around like pigs in shit!"

Another time Randy was put in charge of digging a bomb shelter on the south end of the parachute loft at the AFD. It was the '60s and everyone was digging bomb shelters. Randy was quite the amateur archaeologist, and as far as he was concerned, he was making a dig. No telling what treasures lay buried beneath the earth, as he directed the jumpers assigned to his detail in their excavation project.

Carl Gidlund (MSO-58) and I had been assigned to the Silver City crew again that summer, and we were in place on our beloved Gila Forest busy jumping fires. Toward the end of our season down there, Carl and I got the rare opportunity to head over the border into Mexico, a couple hours' drive from Silver. As we started back to town after enjoying the sights and cheap booze of ol' Mexico, Carl grinned at me and said, "I got this special for Randy. I'm gonna sandbag that dude good when we get back to Missoula." He held out a clay mortar and pestle that looked like it was a million years old but had probably been made in Las Palomas earlier that year. "I'm gonna stash this up at the head end of Randy's tunnel and let him discover it."

And Carl did exactly that. A few days later, back in Missoula, Carl bided his time and after work stopped at the excavation site for the day, he buried his "ancient relic" where Randy's crew was sure to find it the next day. Actually, Randy discovered it himself. He came completely unglued. He ran screaming into the loft, holding his mortar and pestle high, announcing to the world he'd made the discovery of the century. A few minutes later, Carl came out to meet me, his face white and his hands almost shaking. "Whadda I do now? Randy's so damn excited about that mortar he's on the phone to one of the professors at the U arrangin' a meeting out here tomorrow!" "You better tell him, Gid", I said. "There's no telling what Randy will do if you let him drag that mortar out in front of a real expert."

Carl gathered his nerves and 'fessed up' to Randy. Randy was so god-damned mad, he wouldn't speak to anyone about it for days. I don't think he said a single word to Gidlund until the next fire season. 🦉

Small Town Connections

by Gary G. "Pops" Johnson (Fairbanks '74)

Sandpoint, at one time, was a sleepy, quiet logging and railroad town. No so anymore. People from all over the country have discovered its natural beauty. No longer its former self, the town is changing and not for the best.

In seven decades, many smokejumpers have come out of Sandpoint. They account for about 1,000 fire jumps. Missoula, McCall, and Winthrop have probably produced more local jumpers because the jump bases are located right there. Sandpoint has no jump base.

Here is a list of Sandpoint jumpers and the number of fire jumps each. Some, I guessed at, but I should be close.

Al Cramer (MSO-43)—He was an early pioneer jumper who spotted the jumpers for the demonstration jump near the White House Lawn. Al had 100+ fire jumps.

Bob Sallee (MSO-49)—Many of my uncles went to school with Bob. He was the last living smokejumper of the Mann Gulch Fire. Bob had about ten fire jumps.

Jim Thompson (MSO-63)—I grew up with all the Thompson brothers. Jim had 15 fire jumps.

Bill Gastineau (MSO-63)—He and my cousin were on the State Championship basketball team. Bill has 22 fire jumps.

Kevin Brown (MSO-66)—We were in high school together. Keven held the Idaho record for the one-mile race in Track & Field. He had 33 fire jumps.

Steve Walker (MSO-68)—We spent a year together in Europe. Steve had 55 fire jumps.

Mike Boeck (IDC-69)—Mike was one of my brother's best friends and had 15 fire jumps.

Wayne Fields (BOI-70)—Wayne had 70 fire jumps.

Doug Abromeit (MYC-71)—Doug had 50 fire jumps.

Dann Hall (ANC-72)—A close friend since the 8th grade. He earned the nickname "Free Fall Hall" for failing to hookup during a fire jump. Fortunately, the spotter caught it, or Dann might have had less than an estimated 10 fire jumps.

John Snedden (BOI-73)—John was my brother's best friend and had 27 fire jumps.

Gary "Pops" Johnson (FBX-72)—I was one of the two jumpers credited for saving **Gene Hobbs** (IDC-61) life in that accident in Alaska and had 120 fire jumps.

John Olson (FBX-77)—I helped John get his first Alaskan job. He had 70 fire jumps.

Jim Olson (FBX-78)—Jim had a long smokejumping career and helped improve the Ram Air parachute system. He had over 200 fire jumps.

Kim Keaton (FBX-79)—Kim had about 50 fire jumps.

Scott Chehock (FBX-79)—At one time Scotty was the youngest ski instructor in the U.S. He had about 70 fire jumps.

Kip Shields (FBX-04)—My wife, Diane, and I babysat Kip when he was below knee high. Kip was on the Silver State Hotshots for five years when I was AFMO for the Carson District. Our families go back five generations in Sandpoint. He had 103 fire jumps.

Not bad for little ole Sandpoint. Hope you enjoyed these connections to the past. 🍷

Turn Your Pins and Patches Into Helping Other Smokejumpers and Their Families

Send us your Smokejumper or other pins, Trail Crew pins, and/or patches that are hiding in your sock drawer. We'll sell them to collectors on eBay with all money going into the NSA Good Samaritan Fund and acknowledge you in a later issue.

*Send to: Chuck Sheley
10 Judy Lane
Chico CA 95926*

Deep Tears

POST-WAR HMONG RESISTANCE IN LAOS (1975–1990)

BY GAYLE L. MORRISON

From 1961–75, the US Central Intelligence Agency trained, armed, and supported General Yang Pao's guerrilla soldiers in the fight against communist Pathet Lao and North Vietnamese Army troops during the "secret war" in Laos. When the US abruptly withdrew from Vietnam and Laos in the spring of 1975, victorious communist regimes took control of both countries. In Laos, US-allied Hmong soon faced reprisals.

Deep Tears provides first-hand accounts of the horror facing more than 100,000 people who fled into the jungles. Half of them died from military attacks, disease, starvation, chemical poisoning, drowning, or imprisonment. The speakers address a brutal period of history in Laos and give insight into why anti-communist resistance was so widely supported by Hmong in Laos, Thailand, and the US in the 1980s—and why it did not succeed.



Gayle L. Morrison has worked with the Hmong community since 1977 in refugee services, private enterprise, and education. *Deep Tears* is her third Hmong oral history book. Research for this book was supported by the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH).

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(also can be ordered from Barnes & Noble and most other bookstores)

Interviews, photographs, maps, notes, bibliography, index • Softcover 2023

Lost Horizons

by Pat Harbine (Missoula '51)

Unlike other young men, I had never ridden in enclosed vehicles until I was 17. My family's vehicle was an old farm truck and I seldom rode inside.

Born and raised with the wind in my face, I had to ride where the horizon was visible and a window open. Nausea would overcome me if I lost sight of the mountain ridges! Back seats and stuffy cars were things that put me on the edge of heaving.

It did not occur to me when I joined the smokejumpers that flying over the mountains would test my tender stomach to the limit.

Protection for a smokejumper is cumbersome. Consisting of sturdy boots, gloves, a heavyweight canvas suit, and a football helmet. The gear is designed to allow a man to drop through the branches of a tree without being scratched or speared.

The straps that attach the main and emergency parachutes are passed beneath the wearer's buttocks, restricting the person's posture. The jumper's stature, once fully dressed, resembles that of an old crone! Hot and uncomfortable, one can only hope for a short, smooth ride.

My first fire jump tested my resolve. Encased in the heavy canvas suit and helmet with a parachute strapped to my back, I sweated and peered out the airplane's open door. I hoped to continue to see the horizon which somehow calmed my anxious stomach.

All too soon, mountainous terrain was all that was visible. The ancient Trimotor airplane rocked and heaved in the strong updrafts. Did I say "heaved?" That was the sensation my gut was wrestling against. The pilots in the cabin looked back and laughed at all the green faces. The joke would be on them if someone heaved. The pilots would have to clean it up.

Like a game of dominoes, if one jumper threw up, the others would lose the contents of their guts as well. I had had a few moments to reflect on my second helping of the cook's sumptuous meal. Would it soon be spread on the airplane's

floor?

Finally, we were above the fire. The spotter moved to the airplane door and deployed a small parachute to test the wind direction. Moments later he directed the first jumper into position at the door.

God, I wished it was me! We had all clipped our static line to the cable anchored to the plane and stood to advance to the doorway.

Finally, it was my turn to kneel at the doorway and wait for the spotter's command to jump. Leaping free of the plane, I felt the chute open and suddenly all was quiet. The fresh air felt refreshing; the noise and the aircraft were gone.

Slowly the parachute spun. This must be like

Finally, it was my turn to kneel at the doorway and wait for the spotter's command to jump. Leaping free of the plane, I felt the chute open and suddenly all was quiet. The fresh air felt refreshing; the noise and the aircraft were gone.

heaven. The plane was visible in the distance and chutes were on the ground as I concentrated on landing near them. The ground rose slowly to meet me and I performed a classic Allen roll. The heavy trappings of a smokejumper were hastily shed and I waited with the others for the fire packs to drop. The plane left and we were alone with the fire.

Numerous fire jumps conditioned me to control my nervous stomach. Over the years I've ridden in many vehicles that rocked and gyrated violently – sleds, kayaks, motorcycles, and carnival rides. Nonetheless, if I lose sight of the horizon line, I become a helpless heap, begging to stop the boat, car, or airplane so I can get out and puke. 🙄



ODDS AND ENDS

Chuck Sheley (Cave Junction '59) Congratulations and thanks to **John Doran** (NCSB-72), **Harold Flake** (IDC-61), **Larry Wright** (CJ-56) and **Elijah Stuenkel** (Assoc.) who just became our latest Life Members.

Chris Schow (MYC-88), concerning the article on **Neil Satterwhite** (MYC-65) in the Jan. 2023 issue of *Smokejumper*: "My dad had two jumper friends that meant a lot to him and to me also. Neil was a high school friend of dad's and a model of toughness and resilience. The other was **Bill Terrill** (MSO-73), who jumped in MSO and AK. He was a USFS silviculturist when I knew him and a man of deep professional passion and integrity. I was fortunate to work on the Sandpoint RD with him just before he retired. I'd broken my leg on a jump and took an engine job in Sandpoint where Bill was the zone silviculturist. He could beat me at the pack test at retirement age! They are both gone now, and I feel fortunate to have known them both and know that the trajectory of my life was in part plotted by them."

Mike Nielson (MYC-73): "Thanks for the inclusion of the Neil Satterwhite short in the January issue. The Holidays (written in Jan. 2023) cause me to hibernate and reflect as I seem to replicate the experience from this same time frame in the Nam, roughly 11/10/67—3/6/68, first and second time wounded. Recall only seems to get more vivid as the years go by. I avoided reunions for years, recognizing that it wasn't the same. **Jerry Ogawa** (MYC-67) convinced me to re-engage and he was right. Recollection turned out to be a good thing. If memories of Nam haunts and hurts, recalling the glory days of smokejumping in the 70s heals."

Bruce Jackson (RAC-69): "Just finished consuming cover to cover the January issue of *Smokejumper*. It rates as one of the best yet with a fine



balance of joy and grief. Joy in the accolades for the Boise Reunion and the number of uplifting and humorous comments and articles. The grief is reflected in those articles condemning 'Managed Fire' and the devastation to our forests, private property, and the lives that fall in the wake of that destructive and vain philosophy."

John Mowery (MYC-64): "I am amazed how professionally and beautifully each edition of the magazine is written and published."

Mike Bina (MSO-68), concerning the Higgins Ridge documentary on PBS: "Wonderful production. So much grabbed me, but Bill Magnusson, the 30-year-old ranger who unselfishly got out of the helicopter and didn't reboard until AFTER all jumpers were safely evacuated was beyond my words to describe. And Rod's (**Rod Snider**-NCSB/51) humble words and facial expressions when asked about what he did are inspiring and moving. No one knows how they will react, and who they are at their core, until he or she is challenged with their own lives. The ranger and Rod, it was apparent, didn't have to think about what they would do to save others putting themselves at grave risk themselves. They demonstrated what unselfishness truly is."

Tom Kovalicky (MSO-61): "The last issue of *Smokejumper* (Jan. 2023) is a sterling production. A first-class job of recording our history."

Associated Press: "Colorado lawmakers are considering joining other Western states by adopting artificial intelligence in hopes of detecting blazes before they burn out of control. Vaughn Jones, who heads wildfire management for Colorado's fire prevention agency, said the technology 'allows us to take *very aggressive early action*, not waiting until the end of the day to start playing catch-up.'"

Sandy Holtet: “It is with a heavy heart that I’m writing to you to inform you that my husband of 60 years, **John Holtet** (MSO-61), passed away January 10, 2023. He jumped the Higgins Ridge Fire, and he owed his life to **Rod Snider** (NCSB-51). We attended the Oct. 2022 preview of the documentary and I finally met Rod. Our two children were also there. We were so happy he was able to attend the preview.”

Mike Horey (NCSB-71): “I look forward to every edition of *Smokejumper* magazine. It’s great to read about all that is happening in the NSA and the smokejumper nation.”

Smokejumper pilot **Ken Herrick** was featured in an article in *Epoch Times* (Feb. 22/24-23). Ken flew jumpers for eight years and is now retired. He volunteers time at the Yellowstone Nature Connection in the town of West Yellowstone. **Jim Kitchen** (FBX-87) is the president of this non-profit organization.

Norm Kamrud (MSO-64): “A point of interest—**Steve Anderson** (MSO-63) is the father of Tobin Anderson who coached Fairleigh Dickinson University to a win over Purdue University in the NCAA “March Madness” Basketball Tournament. Second time in NCAA basketball tournament history that a 16th seeded team has defeated a number one seeded team.”

Bill Moody (NCSB-57): “Chuck—another great magazine. Reference article on **John Rolf** (GAC-57). John was my fire crew foreman 1956, Crescent R.D., Deschutes NF. John was a great foreman/leader and instructor—just a real nice guy. He talked about jumping the next summer. When he heard CJ was going to jump a fire on

the Crescent, he drove us for an hour to a vantage point so we could see the jump on the next ridge. That inspired me to become a jumper.”

Bob Burns (Assoc.): “Chuck—You did a great job putting **John Rolf** (GAC-57) and Moose Creek and some attendant history all together in a very professional manner. In other words, you are good at what you do.”

Jon Klingel (CJ-65): “The background on the climbing photo in this issue: A bunch of us were sent to the Galice Dist. to pull old phone line insulators, which meant climbing on some big trees, but not very high. **Terry McWhinney** (CJ-64) was the squadleader. I remember finding that on the big trees with rough bark, i.e., 6-8 ft dbh Doug fir, you could not just flip the rope up like on smaller trees. Terry was a good climber and taught us how to flip the rope so it would ‘step up’ as it went around the tree. We were over by the tallest known Ponderosa, so we practiced on a nearby tree that looked about as tall. The ability to climb big trees paid off well over the next couple years. I earned a lot of beer climbing for MSO guys that had landed in big trees.”

John Blackwell (MYC-64): “Chuck, thank you for the 1945 letter home from a CPS jumper. Family history on **Hubert Blackwell’s** (MSO-44) reasons for joining the CPS program is sketchy to non-existent. He died too young for me to know him well but, still, he was my hero. Any time I can read about the CPS jumpers I exult in it. Too, **Norm Pawlowski’s** (CJ-57) articles are gripping and I enjoy reading them. Thanks for all you’ve done and continue to do with the magazine, membership, and history, as starters!” 🙏

Whites Off the Breaks

by Mike Nielson (McCall '73)

In the early to mid-1970s, McCall had the aura of being a lakefront operational mill town, with the requisite teepee burner that contributed to the wood smoke aromatics of the 5000-foot elevation mountain air.

By Memorial Day weekend, remnants of winter’s snow were still evident. The snow was giving

way to a new summer season with an old welcoming tradition of the arrival of the R-4 McCall Smokejumpers, 52 unique characters with one commonality—to make the most money fighting fire before the next snow flew.

The return of experienced jumpers from the previous year made for few openings for training

“Neds,” as the rookies were called. There were two openings in 1972, filled by **Gary Benavidez** (MYC-72) and **Vince Masi** (MYC-72). They were sent to the Redmond base for training. This was an experience that Foreman **Del Catlin** (MYC-47) vowed never to do again due to some severe hazing that the R-6 trainers felt compelled to do to our Neds.

A lot of that unique character enabled both to endure and overcome the worst that the Redmond trainers dished out. Both returned to McCall fully qualified. Benavidez was officially qualified, while Masi left his gear and hitchhiked, which Catlin sent him back to retrieve. Redmond had seen all it wanted of Vince and accommodated his turnaround to McCall with his gear.

RAC had no idea who it was hazing. Masi was Sicilian and had a short fuse to fisticuffs. Vince had been a door gunner on a Huey gunship in Vietnam and a hard hat diver on the oil rigs in the Santa Barbara Channel. Benavidez was from Silver City, N.M., and ran at high altitude as if it was sea level, never beaten in the mile-and-a-half qualifying run. “Benny” joined his cousin **Tony Beltran** (IDC-69) as the favored “Sons of Silver.”

The low turnover on the 52-man roster meant we got to witness the annual return of old friends who usually arrive, some after taking their last final college exam in some variation of the following:

No wife—new truck, same ol’ wife—same ol’ truck, new wife—no truck, left wife—kept truck, wife left—she kept truck. The combination you never saw was new wife—new truck. The two just didn’t go together.

If the purpose was to make the most pay and overtime, the less baggage you brought enabled the cause. I was still carrying baggage from Vietnam, but everything else fit into two Marine Corps seabags in the back of my Jeep, which put me bunking with **Everett “Sam/Doc” Houston** (MYC-71).

The seasonal influx with what was available in the local housing market never seemed to be an issue as barracks, trailer parks, and apartments met our transient demand. One of the more infamous accommodations was “The Hog House,” occupied by a couple of permanent residents, **Neal Davis** (MYC-69) and **Lee Jensen** (MYC-69).

The Hog House was prominent for its location downtown and infamous for the kegger hosted there and the comings and goings of female hangers-on, none of whom seemed to fit any of the return categories. The Hog House had an all-season Spring Break atmosphere—park on the lawn, the door is open, help yourself to the kitchen. Just don’t block the driveway where an ol’ truck with a bed full of snow keeps the keg cold.

We never needed an excuse for a kegger, but tradition held that the beginning of the season was celebrated with a kegger after the returning jumpers completed their qualifying jumps. It wasn’t so much practice as it was muscle memory recall, and an instinct refresher to what you’d been trained to do and had already done.

The thinking part never played a part in being a smokejumper as it opened the prone-to-error aspect. Hence, in the trained instinct and the low-level drop altitude, you didn’t have time to think – you reacted instinctively to your training. In the early ’70s, the base had a wealth of experienced leaders and trainers beginning with Catlin, Loft Foreman **Wayne Webb** (MYC-46), **Carl Rosselli** (MYC-48), **Bruce Yergenson** (MYC-54), **Thad Duel** (MYC-56), **Jerry Blattner** (MYC-63), **Dick Lynch** (MYC-64), and **Dick Jeppson** (MYC-67). All that wealth passed in training made you rich and honored to be in the same company.

This was the other celebratory occasion for a kegger—the completion of training of the new “Neds.” The roster strength may have been 52, but the active jump list hovered in the low 40s. The completion of rookie training was always cause for a kegger, where posture and profile revealed swagger and attitude—a bonding opportunity of measure and more worthiness having puked and sweated through training.

Your deportment at the kegger was under review and scrutinized by true experienced hands at drinking beer. Woe that you puke at a qualifying kegger.

The new Ned kegger in ’73 was to be baptismal. Whether anyone would drown in the beer was still in question when the returned jumpers were standing around the bonfire telling stories. The new Neds were just standing around—snooze in their lip, red Solo cup in hand, shuffling in their new Whites, other hand in their

pocket, and looking around for a trainer.

They hadn't learned that exiting a perfectly good aircraft at 90 knots and getting to the ground was only a small part in the qualifying criteria to become a McCall smokejumper. Neds still had to learn that the bold, aggressive, freedom-loving, individual, colorful character aspects that had brought them this far still needed definition that was only acquired with meritorious and remarkable deeds accomplished in the company of your fellow jumpers. They were not yet company. Aspiring, but not yet accomplished. Deep in thought pondering a fit-in does not make for camaraderie.

In the manner of a substance filling a void, the question of character was about to be answered when a '52 Chevy pickup pulled up. The tall, lanky driver stepped out. The drop-dead gorgeous blonde passenger stepped out. The driver held a bottle of Jack Daniels in his right hand, and his left arm was possessively draped over the shoulder of the blonde. A new arrival mode had just been introduced—ol' truck, notta wife.

I was deep in thought and totally focused on the blonde when the driver walked up to me and said, "Anyone ever tell you that you look like a walrus?"

Okay, I did sport a very bushy mustache, but it didn't define me. So, my response was, "No, no one has ever had the balls." Attitude emerging.

"You look like a walrus."

I didn't have as short a fuse as Vince Masi, so I went to "Process and Evaluate" rather than "Execution." But my posture indicated something less cerebral and more volatile and prompted my wingman to intercede with, "Don't you know who this is? This is our pilot."

The interruption took me out of cerebral to, "I don't care who he is. He called me a walrus."

By this time, word had spread that, "Whoa! The Ned is going to punch out Nic."

My wingman was **Jim "Doo-Dah" Diederich** (RDD-70), and he interceded and said, "You two need to introduce yourselves."

I'd gone back to cerebral with Jim's defusing and "Evaluated" that this was no insult, not even a challenge but an acknowledgment. I went back to ogling the blonde when Nic said, "I'm Bob Nicol."

"Walrus. Wanna share?" Still ogling the blonde, my new friend, Bob, responded with, "The Jack. Not the Jill." Her name wasn't Jill.

I didn't know it at the time, but **Bob Nicol** (MSO-52) was one of us. As an Intermountain Twin Otter pilot, Bob commanded that aircraft as an extension of himself and made it do his bidding. I witnessed this fact in a demo film called *Total Air Support* and on a later demob out of Taylor Ranch on Big Creek when Bob coaxed the loaded Otter airborne in what seemed an impossible run-out. If the freedom-loving, colorful characters we were bent the rules and resented unnecessary authority, then Bob was definitely one of us.

On more than one occasion, Bob had a case of beer on the floor, under cover, behind the cockpit on a demob flight back to McCall with a well-understood caveat—leave no empties.

The objective of the R-4 smokejumper base in McCall was to have a full roster, jump-qualified, and ready in the two weeks after Memorial Day. Your position on the jump list had the same elements at play: Anticipation, Anxiety, Adrenalin, Altitude and Attitude—the Five A's.

The first load in '73 boosted to Alaska the third week of June, making their first jump the first week in July, logging multiple pay categories in their pocket logbooks. The first Doug load of 12 in '74 jumped the Squaw Basin Fire in Utah the end of June.

Both starts were multiple moneymakers. The jump list was moving, overtime and hazard pay was being logged, the Five A's were active, bank accounts were growing, the buzzer signaling a fire call was constantly going off, the mindset was *rest in the offseason, make hay in the fire season*—life was good. Fire activity relegated the community of McCall to being where we resupplied and recharged.

McCall then had a mercantile called Shavers. It was what Amazon would become. If they didn't have it, you didn't need it. Resupplying at Shavers was one-stop shopping—groceries, gloves, socks, Levi's 501s, flannel shirts, beer—and all you had to do as a jumper was to sign the receipt if you were cash-strapped. Shavers would send the bill to the base at the end of the month.

Shavers wasn't unique in this favored regard

for the smokejumpers. The local constabulary extended a lot of leeway in our transgressions, and there always seemed to be a leniency with merchants during the season that acknowledged we were often gone on fires and would settle up when we weren't.

When we weren't gone or on standby meant we were doing project work, none of which in my nostalgia seemed to be work.

There was the de-fence project west of Cascade Lake that consisted of taking down posts and barbed wire along the ridge top. There was the Paddy Flat fence project that consisted of cutting lodgepole, draw-knifing the bark and using the poles in an X-fence style to fence in a meadow; presumably for elephants due to the size of the poles, which happened to be the right size for building a sauna back at the barracks on base. Then there was the climbing and topping of trees for the purpose of encouraging osprey to nest.

The plum detail was the delivery of freshly cut alfalfa to the Big Creek RS. The alfalfa was in bales weighing around 100 pounds, which meant it was heavy for the stake-side truck they were loaded on.

It was still early spring, and the road into Big Creek was circumspect with runoff and mud. Six of us were sent with a winch. We stopped for lunch, made our way to the Big Creek RS, unloaded the bales, then headed back to McCall with a marvel at being paid for this detail and harboring a thirst from the effort.

When the uncertainty of where to quench that thirst materialized, the answer came in the form of **Neil "Squoddy Body" Satterwhite** (MYC-65). He was the demoted Ned trainer who had been too harsh and demanding on the physical part of rookie training—something about pre-dawn runs that ended up with a jump in the lake.

"YOU! Glass or plastic?" "Uh, glass?"

"Smart. Lardo's. Now! You're buying!"

McCall had several post-work details, post-fire recovery depots—bars, saloons, taverns, cantinas, a dive or two and a Yacht Club. Lardos Saloon still had frosted glass pitchers and mugs and hadn't gone plastic. The beer just tasted colder in glass. I'd had my last warm beer in Vietnam, so cold in a glass got no argument from me.

Lardos Saloon was more like a Viking long

house with long tables, a cavernous interior, the occasional Valkyrie server, and a pot-bellied stove that had been retired from duty during the summer. It was elbow room for drinking arms and plank floor space for Whites. Neil had rounded up some other "thirsties" and ordered up three pitchers with the command to the working Valkyrie that there was never to be an empty pitcher.

It didn't take long, thirst cut into volume quickly. Now Neil was of the mind that every fourth pitcher was on the house. The Valkyrie was absent, a pitcher was empty, so Neil took the empty, went behind the bar and proceeded to fill it when Louie—the owner—confronted Neil for his presence behind the bar and his audacity.

Neil said to Louie: "We own this place. You just manage it for us." Audacity is not a sixth "A." It's a component of the fifth "A"—Attitude.

Fortunately, it was a slow pour as Neil explained the role of manager—every fourth pitcher free. Louie and Neil were both the same height, so a physical, dominating factor of heft and hulk did not come into play. It was more a clash of beer etiquette and quick mathematical calculation on the part of Louie as Neil was striving to minimize the froth head on the pitcher, prompting: "You need a new keg. This one is done and all foam." Neil didn't do foam.

Louie was thinking, *I'm in the business of selling beer. Why do I have to buy beer I've already bought?* Louie logic. Neil was thinking: *Why do I have to buy beer that somebody else has already bought?* Squoddy logic.

The thirst at the table was not thinking. They were saying, "We'll settle up later! More beer!" The Valkyrie re-emerged, took the empty pitchers away from the table and started refilling two more cold pitchers, which made everybody happy, so happy that Neil lost count. Louie didn't. But nobody cared. When the tab came, we did a heads-out flip for the bill and some Ned ended up paying. More Squoddy logic.

The R-4 Smokejumper Base in McCall, established in 1943, was unique compared to other bases in that it wasn't located on the airport. The McCall Airport was a half-mile up the road from the base with a cemetery in between it and the base, which I always thought ominous. It quickened the training-run pace going past it and was

right under the airport flight path, seemingly like an omen to pay homage to—not that I knew any of its occupants.

Relief from this daily ode to the departed wouldn't come until 1988, when the base was relocated to the airport. Until then, we were trucked from the loft to our waiting aircraft—not unlike Allied bomber crews at English bases during World War II. We had incendiary in common, and the image was more so with a B-17 air tanker sitting at the retardant base—albeit with a crew of two instead of 10 and carrying a 2,000-gallon bomb load of Pho-Chek that would need every bit of the 6,100-foot runway for a lumbering takeoff.

The truck ride from the loft to the base added to the anticipation-anxiety-adrenalin-altitude-attitude emotion buildup. The other add was the inhalation of engine exhaust fumes as engines were warming up and suited jumpers were loading. Relief from the fumes added to the emotions coming from being airborne, destination still an unknown with only the Neds wondering. Fire is fire. It's what we do.

The Raven Creek Fire, highlighted in “Whites on the Breaks” in the July 2022 quarterly issue of *Smokejumper*, had 12 jumpers back in McCall to resupply and recharge. Resupply entailed a laundry detail with **Steve Jakala** (MYC-74) to the Duds and Suds laundromat that ate a roll of quarters while sitting on the porch, Varnette sunglasses and watching the thunderheads build over Jughandle Mountain to the east.

The Raven Creek guys would supply the other missing component. Satterwhite attended as “Commodore” and brought along some ballast in his roommate **Jim “Buck” Carter** (MYC-67), **Jerry “Light’n” Dixon** (MYC-71) and new Ned **Clay Morgan** (MYC-74). Carter was still trying to claw his way back into good graces from '73 when he won the Big Flip heads-out (an \$800 pot) and didn't make a contribution to that year's T-Party, the traditional end-of-season termination kegger.

If the established recharge criteria were glass pitchers, the Yacht Club qualified. You ascended a staircase to the Yacht Club where the ballroom floor had tables set around the perimeter with a juke box along the wall. On this evening there was no server and no other clientele which made

for a “just right” recharge. There were enough quarters left over from the guys who went to the other Busy Bubbles Laundromat that the juke box started getting fed before the Commodore approved the noise over the stories.

This was not likely to bode well, as music in McCall was a force-feed from KMCL (K-McCall Country) that was a steady diet of too many public-service announcements and sing-song country whine (“She done left in my truck and took the dog and my paycheck ...”).

In the lowlands of Idaho, the music was country or disco. The McCall Smokejumpers preferred mountain rock—fast, hard-driving, prominent percussion, big bass guitar-forward, get down raunch, all typified in similarity to their characters and by the band Tarwater. And it was likely that Tarwater wouldn't be a selection on the Yacht Club's juke box.

Changes. Some are subtle. Some more flamboyant. Returning smokejumpers to McCall noticed the subtle changes. The new Neds didn't. They were focused on all the intricacies of getting their firefighting skills to a fire via parachute. They didn't notice the change from an FS-5A to a FS-T10.

Everything was new to the Neds. Everything was familiar to the returning guys because there was, by the mid-'70s, 30 years of heritage and legacy to the smokejumper base in McCall. Subtle changes. The Foresters was still a shot and a glass local bar for locals, nothing bright or noisy, and a favorite watering hole of **James “Duke” Norfleet** (MYC-70) where he fit in like the local he was.

The Mill was where we carnivores went to cleanse the palate of fire freeze-dried with blood-red steak despite having to clean up and rub elbows with tourists. The lower level bar at Shore Lodge was more of a two-manner when two were inclined to recharge in quiet solitude and speak privately of mutualities like the Vietnam experience—Everett Houston, Green Beret medic, Air America kicker extraordinaire.

Changes. The sawmill ceased operations and closed in 1977. McCall was no longer a mill town where the lake had been the mill pond. The town with a population of 1,700 in the '70s would double as it transitioned to a still familiar resort town. The Pancake House still served huckleberry

pancakes that ate into a smokejumper's subsistence budget, and Louie's Lardo's Saloon was becoming known for its mushroom burgers and remodeling to accommodate the cuisine crowd.

You couldn't call the waitresses Valkyries anymore as Louie eventually went to plastic pitchers and permanently discarded the fourth pitcher-free policy, even though his volume in burgers would have absorbed the cost easily. Tourists are hungry, readily pay and don't expect freebies.

Changes: The seasons in McCall, late spring snow remnants with a hint of chill. Summer money-making season, first fire jumps usually toward the end of June, seeing fire calls all over the central Idaho mountain backcountry on the Payette, the Challis and the Salmon national forests, the Salmon River Breaks, the Sawtooths, the Seven Devils, backup boosts to Redding and Alaska, the occasional jump in the Wallowa's in R-6 and an Ashley NF jump in the Primitive Area in Utah.

The last jump of the season was usually late August and early September. By then, fall was making changes with the aspen turning yellow,

the tamarack showing color in the dark green stands of lodgepole, as the chill in the air signaling the end of the money-making season. School was calling the teachers and students among us. It was time to plan the Big Flip and the Termination Party before everybody left for the winter.

McCall was where Highway 55 made a left-hand turn at the Hotel McCall and went west to New Meadows, where it went north again. No matter your season-ending exiting direction, there was always a look-back when leaving town. The look-back had to do with elements of the fifth "A" – Attitude – which were Admiration and Appreciation.

The changes we McCall Smokejumpers thought we'd brought to McCall were nowhere near the changes McCall had made in us. We may have been elite as smokejumpers with Audacity as our calling card, but there was something about McCall that called us back season after season. In the look-back we were proud and a wee bit humble in calling McCall home – if only for a season. 🦋

Moose Tracks in the Timber

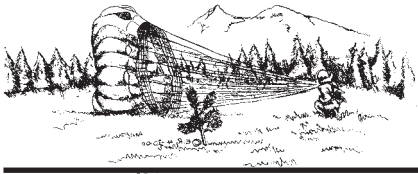
by Karl Brauneis (Missoula '77)

The beauty of living a forester's life is that you are typically out in the woods observing creation at work. It was cool one early morning with a bit of autumn frost, and I was looking at some timber sale area improvement on a few of our old cutting units. It was then that I watched a big bull moose walk through one of our beautiful, regenerated clear-cuts. The trees were young saplings from waist to chest in height of lodgepole pine. The big bull walked through the center of the unit swinging his antlers back and forth, breaking the tree tops off. You could hear the snap of the tops, and he seemed to find great pleasure in what he was doing.

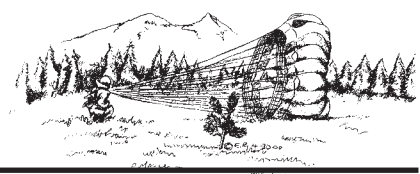
The bull turned to look at me a few times and then continued on his path of "forest destruction." I thought, "Now that is interesting – what a jerk." With the apical bud snapped off, a lateral bud will later turn up to replace the lost apex. I didn't think much more about it until the custom-made pine beds became popular. Folks soon asked me where

they might cut curved lodgepole pine to design decorative head and foot board additions to their artistic beds. I kept the requests in the back of my mind as I was out and about doing what foresters do.

Then one day I stopped and ate lunch about a ½ mile from where I had seen the bull moose enjoy his work years earlier. I looked at the post and small sawlog lodgepole pine around me, and sure enough—bent tree boles. I got up and looked closer and observed that one could draw a straight line through the woods of the bent trees. I walked further over and saw another line of bent trees further out. All in a straight line. It was then that I remembered the moose. Twenty to forty years earlier that same bull's forefathers had enjoyed the same walk through the woods. Since then, I am quick to identify these moose tracks in the timber. Interesting too is that the bent trees often hold more value for custom woodwork than the straight trees do for post and sawlog. Sometimes, things are not always as they might seem. 🦋



Notes from the Ranks



Pat McGunagle
(West Yellowstone '19)

YOU'RE READING THIS long after the first fire jump of the 2023 Fire Season has occurred, after new rookies have joined the ranks of smokejumpers, after many things the April we can only guess at. Speculation is the morbid pastime of whiling away standby hours for most firefighters, and a good speculation session with the bros brings as many laughs as guesses for the future. In West Yellowstone a few years ago, after ten or twenty slow days with no fire calls and few extensions, I devised a gambling game with a five-dollar buy-in to throw a dart at a large wall map of the Custer Gallatin in Montana. Unlimited buy-ins allowed: the GPS coordinates of each dart throw was logged, funds collected, and a few days later a first load Missoula booster won the large pot for a fire jump near the Musselshell in Montana. (Brutal, I'd thrown all my darts at the Priors and Little Belts.)

Workforce development and modernization is all the talk right now. Is it speculation? I'm not sure. The youthful version of me, carefree hotshot, sleeping in my truck at rest stops and ranger stations and fishing accesses, and the occasional Walmart, international travel booked the day after fire season ended. That person's gone.

Workforce modernization, what does it look like? The NSA took an official stance advocating for many of the bullet points the workforce modernization push has accomplished and is still lobbying for, via many groups and congressional sponsors. Will federal land management agencies truly offer competitive pay, career incentives, livable wages for the expensive places of the country where forest fires so often occur? The BLM yesterday said "Yes" to the new job classification and pay scale in a more concrete way than the USFS ever has. But again, it's April, and what do you know now in July that I don't? Like sizing up a fire from a smoke report, I'll believe it when I see it.

Maybe the current cash award retention-pay bonuses we receive each paycheck will be resolved into the rumored new PayScale. Maybe I can find avenues to make a career out of the USFS without worrying about the sunk cost of

lost fire seasons as a temporary employee. Maybe I can buy back temporary seasons into my overall fire retirement. Maybe workforce modernization means another level of pride entirely for a job that's never really felt like a real job. But that's the definition of a job you love—it doesn't feel like work.

Personally, workforce modernization looks like this: I leave smokejumping to start a job in Salmon, ID, as a prevention technician on the Salmon Challis N.F. The job is not the permanent seasonal gig I had in Boise or West Yellowstone. This job was converted to a permanent full-time (read: year-round 9-5, what on earth) position as part of a regional push for "workforce modernization." The youthful version of me glares at this geriatric subjugation of self to the Man. But what of those sun-blasted foreign beaches, lilting female accents, hostels-like Bond hideouts? I've been to Burning Man several times. You'd think I'd know better. But the pay bump is substantially years ahead of my jumper pay trajectory. I'm a "primary fire" position still, but if pulling handles and cracking chutes is also primary, well that must be a broad, damned term. Several other bros I have been honored to be in cahoots with have also left smokejumping

this year, and I will have to explore that “primary fire” term debacle with them.

Important: I would not have been eligible or competitive for this new position without the single resource opportunities specifically made available to me due to my status and expected versatility that comes with the title “smokejumper.” My qualifications after years of jumping as a full time “field bro” would have been sub-par to a district engine person with an equal number of years in fire. But because of the single resource seasons I took advantage of, I’m ahead of my peers on crews and districts (in some things—still have zero experience in others).

Perhaps workforce modernization will alleviate some of the siloing that occurs in specialized units like fire and aviation. I think a big reason for the debate on jumper use cases is caused by lack of knowledge shared and general misunderstandings between different programs. Single resource opportunities are great cross-cultural networking opportunities to showcase the work ethic and competency of people from different programs, all while working on a large team fire. There is a lot of buy-in and advocacy for a program when you get to work with new people in a mutually cooperative environment such as an incident management team. After all, the program is the people!

Working within that system, using the single resource

opportunities was critical to my career advancement, and I do not regret the fire jumps I missed. Single resource season has shown me the other world that exists in fire beyond the initial attack anonymity that dominates the work smokejumpers crave. I’m not here to make a legacy, but I am here to

make a difference, and while smokejumping took me out of my comfort zone for several years, right now I think the new challenge is getting back into the overall fire workforce where new adventure awaits. What is that 1990s self-help book, “What is your parachute?” Ha, yeah. Exactly. 🧑‍🦉



Climbing practice at Cave Junction 1960s. (Courtesy Jon Klingel).



SOUNDING OFF from the Editor



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

Jack Demmons and the NSA—A Key Figure— Some Important History—A Must Read!

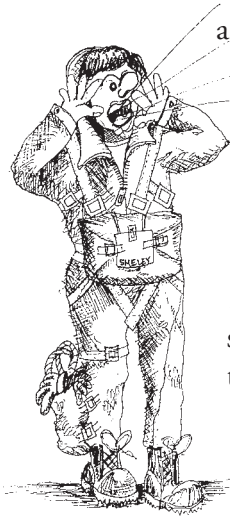
JACK DEMMONS (MSO-50), 92, died September 18, 2022. He was such an important part of the early NSA that this piece needs to be written to preserve our history. When I came on the NSA Board of Directors (BOD) in 1996, Jack was our Historian. He was one of the initial BOD when the organization was founded in 1993. Jack was the guy who daily sat at the NSA Office at the Museum of Mt. Flying at the Missoula Airport.

I wanted to become an integral part of the NSA rather than a person who just at-

tended an annual BOD meeting. That started me communicating with Jack. For some strange reason, I kept his emails between us dating back to 1998. Who in the world does that? Me!

Besides manning our office at the airport, Jack produced *The Static Line* our quarterly newsletter. I'm going to go back through our emails just for the sake of history. The NSA was not a solid organization in its early years. We were on the margin financially, right on the edge. We were a child struggling to exist. How can a bunch of smokejumpers create their own organization and succeed? You know the answer to that when you read the bios of smokejumpers. They are people who are created to succeed. However, it was not easy.

When I first started communicating with Jack, he told me about the workload which was overwhelming him. Membership, money, you name it. Life Members not getting their plaque, card, and knife (which we did at the time). Where was the money going? He had two main concerns that he continued to go to the BOD for help: membership



and merchandise.

In 1998 I went to Missoula and made a presentation to the NSA BOD to take over the merchandising operation. I had the background to do that job and make the NSA money. At the same time, I recommended that the BOD allow someone outside Missoula to take over the task of Membership—that person was **“Spud” DeJarnette** (MSO-49).

The biggest problem, at that time, was that the NSA was the Missoula Smoke-jumper Association. When I ran for office, I was told that only someone who lived in Missoula could be an officer—why? Answer: You had to attend the monthly officers meeting in Missoula. I ran for office, anyway, and had to drive 2,000-mile round trip to Missoula four times for the monthly meetings before they said I could become an officer living outside Missoula.

At the meeting that night, the BOD approved me to do the NSA merchandising and for Spud to do the membership. What a breakthrough!

Now for some early history of the NSA and what it took to get us to the solid organization we are today. Most of this is not good reading if you think everything was a smooth operation in our early

years. However, it needs to be printed so that you, as members, can understand where the NSA came from in those years and where we struggled. Jack Demmons carried 90% of the load.

Oct. 1998. Got an email from Jack. "You are doing one hell of a job (merchandise). The newsletter is being dropped off at the printer. Great feeling every time that is accomplished." Years later, I have that same feeling every time I drop off *Smokejumper* magazine at my layout person's office.

Oct. 27, 1998: "I will be sending you merchandise that was delivered yesterday. The BOD decided to give a free membership to all rookies of 1998. Perhaps you will have some stories I could use in the next newsletter."

Oct. 29, 1998: "Yes, those living outside Missoula need help with the working of the organization. Membership is the life blood of the organization!"

Oct. 30, 1998: "Those of you outside of Missoula need to be involved in the workings of the NSA. I have tried very hard to inform several Directors of the problems we are facing, but they believed I was simply angry."

Nov. 1, 1998: "Had Don Courtney and his wife, Anita, help with the newsletter. It was a 14-hour day and I wanted to get it mailed on time."

Nov. 6, 1998: "Chuck, this operation (NSA) has been expensive for some of us, but not many of us. I have now

put in over 50,000 miles on my vehicle since March 1995. It still costs if you believe in a program such as ours. It is discouraging to see that many of our BOD have not contributed. In a way this reminds me of my military days. Most of the men in my units did not have a high school education. I still feel bitter about this, and as the son of a lifelong logger, I have every right to be. Anyway, I do not begrudge those who grew up with 'silver spoons in their mouths.'"

Nov. 7, 1998: "Cool in the office today. I assume the responsibility of accommodating visitors—there will not be any NSA members here. I set up all the jumper displays and invited members of the Executive Committee (EC) to take a look. Rather discouraging. Some of them give me the impression they could care less. I sent out over 4,000 letters. When I tell the EC, several look at me and could care less."

Nov. 10, 1998: "**Bernie Hilde** (MSO-69) once rode a horse through the Liberal Arts building at the U. of Montana. **Jim "Dirty" Linville** (MSO-69) was arrested for scaling a radio tower near the Clark Fork River." *Jim was a student of mine at Chico Jr. H.S. and a runner on my Track Team. (Ed.)*

Nov. 13, 1998: "I understand that 'Dirty' was arrested for climbing the tower while Bernie stood watching. This happened about 1970. The story is that Dirty was going to jump from the tower." *Jim*

Linville later become Base Manager at Missoula. (Ed.)

Nov. 19, 1998: "Relating to your concern about lack of minutes for our monthly EC meetings—Our President was rather tense and terse about your request."

Dec. 1, 1998: "Our President thought it would have been better for you to appear at an EC meeting (2,000-mile trip) rather than send a letter. Ridiculous! Typical of the way things have gone for more than three years. We still do not have a copy of the minutes since 1994 here in the office."

Jan. 7, 1999: "You are doing a great job (merchandising) out there. Unless individuals are involved in the ordering, processing, packaging, mailing, and making calls, they have no real idea of the magnitude of the job."

Jan. 15, 1999: "I understand why you are concerned about the nonprofit status of our organization. I am concerned that we still do not have a membership committee of the type we had talked about—one where individuals would check files and actively seek out possible members."

Jan. 21, 1999: "What I need is clerical help to free me to do other jobs. If it wasn't for you and getting Spud involved in the 'dirty work,' I don't know what I would do. I have my doubts about office help on a voluntary basis."

Jan. 25, 1999: "Clerical help is of vital importance and lack of such has held me back."

Jan. 27, 1999: “What if our Directors were asked to contribute \$50/\$100 as a one-time contribution to our newsletter. We are so desperate for funding for telephone calls and postage. I have told the EC of this many times.”

April 9, 1999: “It is with deep regret that I announce my resignation from the BOD effective 4/9/99. The Executive Committee has made it increasingly clear that clerical help will not be forthcoming. More and more work has been placed on me, to the point where working on the History of Smokejumping and preparation of the newsletter have taken a distant 2nd priority. If it had been possible to work on history and the newsletter, full-time work in itself, things would be different. It has been a long six-year period, and during this time, I became increasingly hopeful that clerical

help would be forthcoming. I now have become sadly disillusioned and hold out no hope for such help.”

Thus ended Jack Demmons work with the NSA. He faded into the unknown. I lost contact with him over the years but in 2011, I asked him to write articles for *Smokejumper* magazine. Jack was a historian.

From a letter from his brother **Bill Demmons** (MSO-51):

“Jack graduated from the Univ. of Montana in 1952 and reported to Ft. Benning as a 2nd Lt. Following officer training, airborne, and Ranger School, he was sent to Korea. He returned to the states and was assigned as ROTC instructor at the Univ. of Montana. He received his master’s in Education and took a teaching position in Alaska.

“After 11 years, he was asked by the Board of Education at Bonner, Montana, (his

alma mater) to take a Principal’s position. He held that position for 15 years.

“He was a history buff, spending hours at the county library researching and writing articles on the Logging Industry in Western Montana. The manager of the small logging museum in Bonner noted his passing as ‘the loss of a friend in preserving Bonner History.’”

Jack’s history with the NSA needs to be preserved and written about. He was one of those people who was a “worker” in addition to being on the BOD.

He manned the office on a daily basis. He put together and published the newsletter with little or no help. We need to realize the importance of this. Without communication to our membership, we would be an insignificant organization. Let’s not forget Jack Demmons! 🔦



Jack Demmons ((NSA files)

JACK DEMMONS REMEMBERED

We published an obit for Jack in the April 2023 issue of Smokejumper. The following came out in the Missoulian after we went to press with the April issue. Jack was such an important part of the NSA in the early years that I feel we need to print the following. The amount of time that Jack spent at the NSA office at the Museum of Mountain Flying is hard to total. Jack was a key person for us in the early years. (Ed.)

June 15, 1930 - September 18, 2022. Warrior, Teacher, Historian and Nimrod of the Blackfoot River. Jack was born in Missoula to Herbert and Aafje (DeWit) Demmons. Herbert came to Montana from New Brunswick, Canada, and Aafje from Holland as a young child.

Jack grew up in West Riverside, at the time also known as Finntown, or the Flat, and would later move to Piltzville with his family. Jack attended elementary school at Bonner, graduating in 1944 and then attended Missoula County High School, graduating in 1948. During his high school years, he spent several summers working for the BLM in the blister rust control program in northern Idaho and western Montana. After high school Jack worked the summer at the Bonner Mill and then enrolled in classes at Montana State University in Missoula, working nights on the green chain at the mill.

Jack had taken great interest in airplanes and aviation during his grade school years, and as a freshman in high school finally had enough money to take his first flight with a local pilot that owned a Taylorcraft. He took his camera along, taking photographs of the Bonner/ Milltown area and the family home in Piltzville. In the months before his death, Jack recalled in great detail that first flight and his excitement at observing the world from the air.

While in college, Jack would find his way to the sky by applying for a job as a smokejumper with the Forest Service, and after completing training would spend the summers of 1950, '51 and '52 as a Region 1 smokejumper. In one of Jack's favorite stories, he recalls jumping on a fire near Avery, Idaho. After putting the fire out, Jack and his crew gathered their parachutes and equip-

ment and headed downhill to find the Milwaukee railroad. They hiked to the nearest siding and waited for the next train to Missoula. Jack relates that when the train arrived, the conductor "took one look at us and said we were too damn dirty to ride on his train!" After some negotiation they were allowed on and made it back without further difficulty.

While in school at the university, Jack had joined the Army ROTC program, and in 1952 he graduated with a degree in business administration and a regular Army commission in the infantry as a 2nd Lieutenant. Jack began six years of service at the Fort Benning Infantry School, completing the Basic Infantry Officers Course and training in the Paratrooper and Army Ranger schools. He would join the 325th Airborne Infantry Regiment of the 82nd Airborne Division as a Paratrooper, also serving as a company line officer and a battalion intelligence officer. Jack would go on to serve in Korea, being deployed with the 7th US Infantry Regiment of the 3rd Infantry Division. He received a promotion to 1st Lieutenant and would serve as platoon leader of an intelligence and recon platoon, later receiving a commendation for meritorious conduct. After returning stateside, Jack would return to Missoula as an ROTC instructor, and would also conduct training classes at Fort Lewis, Washington.

Jack resigned his Army commission in 1958 to return to the university to pursue a degree in education. In 1962 he accepted his first teaching position with the Alaska On Base School System. This would lead Jack on his first trip over the Alaska Highway to Fort Greely, the location of the Army's Northern Warfare Training Center and its arctic testing facilities. He would teach four years at Fort Greely and experience the bitter cold of December 1964, which would see a low temperature of minus 60 and an average temperature of minus 29 for the month.

Jack next moved to Anchorage to work as a teacher and school administrator at Fort Richardson and would remain there for eight years. During his 12 years in Alaska, Jack returned to Missoula each summer to work on a master's degree

in school administration, which he would receive in 1972. All told, Jack would drive the Alaska Highway an amazing 24 times and have plenty of stories to regale family and friends with.

1974 would bring the opportunity to return home when the Bonner School Board offered Jack the position of Superintendent of the Bonner School District. Jack accepted and began what he called the best time of his life, “with an unmatched team of teachers” on the staff.

During his tenure at Bonner School, Jack spent much of his free time researching history of the Bonner/ Milltown area and gathering information, stories, photographs, family histories and artifacts from the community. His love of local history would turn into two notable projects, the first being publication in 1976 of “A Grass Roots Tribute: The Story of Bonner, Montana.” The second would be the mounting and display of some 1600 photos that Jack would later donate to the Mansfield Library at the University of Montana. The collection would later be digitized as part of the Montana Memory Project, which can be found online.

Jack retired from education in 1989 after 15 years at the helm of Bonner School. He treasured the friendships made with the school staff, the students and their families in a tightly knit community proud of its heritage. Judging by the boxes of cards and letters that he kept from students at every school he served at, Jack was much loved and respected. He started scale model building clubs at each school and very much enjoyed not only mentoring kids in modeling techniques, but also encouraging them to research the history of their projects. Jack generously provided model kits and supplies for students that could not afford them.

Not one to slow down, Jack would go on to many other historical endeavors. He spent several years at The Timber Heritage Foundation as historian, visiting various logging museums across the country and researching the history of logging camps, railroads, and lumber mills around the Pacific Northwest. He also spent many hours attending logging forums and trade shows, seeking out old timers for stories and backgrounds. Jack wrote weekly logging history articles for the Seeley Lake newspaper, called the *Pathfinder*, and wrote articles

for the Montana Logging Association’s monthly publication.

Jack was a dedicated member of National Smokejumper Association and was instrumental in the formation and publishing of a quarterly newsletter called *The Static Line*, which would later become a quarterly magazine called *Smokejumper*. He was also a member of the Museum of Mountain Flying and spent much of his time working on exhibits of aviation history, staffing the gift shop, and conducting tours. Jack enjoyed genealogy and of the thousands of hours he spent at the Missoula Public Library, many were spent researching family trees, ties and histories for family and friends.

Jack had many enjoyable years roaming the Blackfoot and Seeley Swan country. He was a skilled fly fisherman and cast his line into every productive hole and riffle on the Blackfoot River between Bonner and Ovando, making many friends along the way. Jack had much appreciation for being able to experience the river and life during the true “A River Runs Through It” years.

Jack was a regular at Katie O’Keefe’s for many years and very much enjoyed hanging out with the friends that he called the “Cheers” crowd while playing the machines, watching sports, and having a pitcher of Pabst Blue Ribbon. 🍷

Helping with Our History and Getting Paid

The NSA History Preservation Project needs assistance. And we will pay you for your help.

We, at spurts, have need for data management and data entry skills. If you, a family member, or a close associate have time to devote to organizing the data and information that we have, NSA will provide \$20 per/hour.

Do you have basic computer skills? Do you have a basic knowledge of database (Excel or Numbers) entry? Knowledge of Google Sheets? These simple data entry skills will help to update our backlog of information that supports the NSA-EWU academic website that features Smokejumper history: <https://dc.ewu.edu/smokejumpers/>

If you can help, reference this inquiry, and contact Stan Collins at nationalsmokejumpers@gmail.com.

Fighting Wildfire During Extreme Burning Conditions

by Jon Klingel (Cave Junction '65)

It is no secret that the west is getting hotter and drier, the fire season is longer, and fires are burning with more intensity and are bigger.

We had two fires burning simultaneously in New Mexico during summer 2022, and both were larger than any fires in the state's history. However, paying attention to fires in northern New Mexico during the past few years, it seems that the size and number of large fires is not commensurate with what would be expected from the changing climate.

It has become frustratingly clear that the approach to firefighting has changed dramatically, and not for the better. I recognize we need to get low-intensity fire back into some of our ecosystems, at the right time of year. We don't need fires during extreme burning conditions, at the wrong time of year; most of these are human-caused fires.

Based on the changing conditions, I had expected to see a very significant increase in initial attack capabilities combined with strong aggressive attack on those fires that escape initial attack, including quick, intensive activity at night and in rough country. Unfortunately, I am seeing the opposite of what I expected.

I define "extreme burning conditions" as low fuel moisture, low relative humidity, and wind. **If the goal is to keep the fire as small as possible**, by far the best chance to accomplish that is a quick and strong initial attack. Almost all fires start small, so a quick strong response is critical, which usually means helitack and/or smoke-jumpers, unless the fire is quickly accessible by road.

If a fire escapes initial attack under extreme conditions and the burning intensity has become high, there are few options. During a "normal day" starting around 10 a.m., the relative humidity starts to drop, the fine fuels become drier, and the wind picks up with up-slope and up-canyon

winds increasing with the fire intensity increasing. If the fire is in heavy fuels, a plume may develop, sometimes reaching thousands of feet high.



Jon Klingel (Courtesy J. Klingel)

Spotting is common, with spotting distances reaching up to a few miles in front of the fire. Fire behavior can become erratic. Direct attack, working close to the fire, is generally not possible except sometimes at the tail end (up-wind side) of the fire. Under these conditions, daytime firefighting options are limited: firefighters can stay in camp or safety zones, or conduct indirect attack, moving away from the fire to a fireline or road and trying to burn out the fuel.

The probability of failure is high due to spotting, and a lot of country gets burned by the backfire. If the burnout fails, the size of the fire may increase dramatically.

During a "normal night," however, conditions

reverse. The wind dies down, the relative humidity goes up, and the fire lies down. Air flow changes to down-slope and down-canyon.

Watch the plume. It will die down and usually disappear in the evening. In the early morning, the fire won't be putting up much, if any, smoke. On a "normal night," it usually becomes possible to directly attack a fire, building fireline close to the fire's edge and burning out the small strip of fuel between the line and the fire. With luck, when burning picks up in the morning, the fuel in front of the fire is gone. The fire, or that section of it, is contained.

The most dramatic example I've seen was a sagebrush fire in Nevada. The day crew created a line with bulldozers that they claimed was 10 dozer blades wide. I didn't measure it, but it was a wide swath of bare dirt up the middle of the valley.

The crew said that when the fire hit their fire break, it crossed it like it wasn't there. That night, which was a "normal night," we could put out that same line of fire almost as fast as a person could walk, using a shovel. Flame length was only inches.

Certainly not all nights are "normal nights." The wind blows some nights and relative humidity remains low. Under those conditions, fires burn like they burn during the day.

In my opinion, **if you aren't taking advantage of the "normal nights" and fighting the fire at night, you are not effectively fighting the fire.**

Under extreme burning conditions, if the only firefighting is occurring during the day using indirect attack, you almost guarantee the fire will become big – possibly very, very big.

NORTHERN NEW MEXICO

The Midnight Fire (2022) near El Rito, N.M. was reported at 25 acres at 7:46 p.m. The dispatch gave directions how to drive to near the fire and meet to talk about it. There was no mention of helitack, smokejumpers, or air tankers.

Apparently, there was no night firefighting, although the Forest Service reported several days later that they had firefighters on the line early that morning, as if it were unusual. The fire was around 5,000 acres when the monsoon rains came. Initial attack was non-existent.

The Luna Fire near Chacon, N.M. (October 2020). The fire was apparently started by a military airplane in late afternoon and is still listed as "under investigation" two years later. Apparently, none of the eyewitnesses has even been interviewed yet. Forest Service crews didn't show up until the next morning and then left in the evening. No initial attack and no firefighting at night. The fire burned hot during the day with more than a 1.5-mile spotting distance and grew to more than 12,000 acres. The fire was stopped by a snowstorm, not the Forest Service, in late November.

The following spring there was significant flash flooding, debris flows, and a population of Rio Grande Cutthroat Trout destroyed. The Forest Service put cows on the burn the next summer, only seven months after the fire. Is that rational resource management?

The Ensabado Fire near Taos, N.M., was a few years ago. It was reported immediately because many people in Taos saw the lightning strike and the fire start. An air tanker was ordered an hour after the start, and it took three hours before it showed up.

The next day, the Forest Service announced on the radio that, using GPS, it had just measured the fire at 846 acres, had all the resources it could want, "so there wouldn't be a night shift." The records show that crews were out on the line every morning, spent a few hours working on the line, spent the rest of the day in their safety zones and were pulled off for the night.

In other words, crews spent only a couple of hours on the line each day. However, the Forest Service did fly small helicopters with water buckets to and from the fire all day for several days. Small water drops with no one on the line have little effect.

It was apparently a public relations air show. The fire burned about 5,000 acres and had 1,000 people on the fire.

The Calf Canyon and Hermit's Peak Fires (2022) were both started by the Forest Service in April at the beginning of the three-month dry, windy fire season. New Mexico has been in extreme drought with very dry fuels for a long time, and spring is the windy season.

The Hermit's Peak Fire started from a con-

trolled burn that escaped, and the Calf Canyon Fire, from last winter's burn pile, which was not mopped up, and then again not mopped up when smoke showed up this spring. They burned together to form the largest fire in New Mexico history at more than 530 square miles.

Containment was still only 93 percent as of July 14, during the fire's fourth month. As of Oct. 1, the fire has been declared contained but not out. The Forest Service apparently plans to leave the western edge of the fire in the Pecos Wilderness uncontained and not mopped up – claiming it is too steep, rough, and dangerous for their firefighters.

The fire was listed as a “full suppression” fire. The monsoon rains have arrived, so the fire is *mostly* out. Apparently, there was no night fire-fighting. The only mention of “night” was that they were monitoring the fire at night (i.e., watching it burn).

Apparently, all the effort was indirect burnouts during the day. It was a very windy spring, so many of the attempted burnouts were during the day in dry, windy weather.

My impression is that many of the attempted burnouts failed and went big. The fire burned through and around numerous small communities where structure protection was massive, and for the most part successful. Reportedly at least 400 homes burned and perhaps a thousand were damaged, according to the New Mexico governor. I suspect most of the structures lost were during the early phase of the fire before massive structure protection was in place.

The fire had three Type 1 overhead teams – the highest level – on it at one time and as many as 3,000 people. There were numerous fixed-wing air tankers, large helicopters, bulldozers, masticators, structure protection crews, and large fire camps. This fire has cost the taxpayers \$248 million (as of July 13) in fire “fighting” expenses, so far.

These Fires Raise Numerous Questions
Why is there no aggressive initial attack? The fire managers know New Mexico has been in extreme drought and that the springtime three-month fire season is windy. They get daily readings of the fuel moisture and burning conditions. Were helitack crews and smokejumpers pre-posit-

ioned to be ready nearby, as one would expect? I am unaware of any mention of helitack or smokejumpers. It almost seems like they wanted the fires to become big.

Why was there no firefighting at night?

They claim it is a safety issue, and possibly it is a little more dangerous at night, although almost all burnovers – where people are killed by the fire – happen during the day. By not fighting a fire at night under extreme burning conditions, you are not effectively fighting the fire and it will likely become big, or very big. Indirect methods, even if successful, burn up a lot of country.

Which is higher risk – having 3,000 people driving vehicles from all over the western United States, plus all the aircraft and heavy equipment activity, or having a few people stopping the fire at night? I suspect allowing a fire to go big puts more people at higher risk than a few hundred well-trained, conditioned, experienced people working the line at night.

I think the safety excuse is invalid. Certainly, these overhead teams know the policy is invalid and dangerous. You don't end up on a Type I overhead team without knowing basic fire behavior. They certainly know that only using indirect methods guarantees the fires will go big. Not fighting fires at night appears to be a national level policy or directive. Who really benefits from that policy?

Having the Forest Service look like a grossly incompetent fire organization is not in the best interest of the agency. Safety has always been a major focus in firefighting and the agency used to be quite competent. Why the sudden change? Was the intent to make sure the fires went big? Who benefits from letting the fires go big? Hundreds of millions of dollars is big business.

Was the extensive use of indirect burn-out operations justified? Did they accomplish their purpose? Did they burn up a lot of country and/or houses unnecessarily? How many square miles were burned by excessive burn-out operations? It may be a significant portion of the fire. To answer these questions, one would have to do considerable research.

You would need to examine daily shift assignments, who was sent where and what the assignment was. Then study the map to see what hap-

pened to each burnout and look at the weather for that day. Interviews with the firefighters involved might also be necessary. This in-depth analysis probably won't happen, so even if half the 500 square miles were from burnout operations, no one will know.

What is the objective of Forest Service firefighting under extreme burning conditions?

Clearly, it is not to keep the fires as small as possible. How big would these fires have been if they were fought (e.g., aggressive initial attack and night shifts)? How big would they have been if they weren't fought at all (i.e., no indirect burnouts)? One can only speculate at this point but perhaps with some research, estimates would be possible.

Who benefits from large fires and policies such as "too steep and too rough" and the lack of night firefighting? The Forest Service doesn't benefit by looking incompetent. Who came up with these policies? Is it a case of follow the money? Big fires are very big business and generate hundreds of millions of dollars for the fire-support industry! How much political pressure is applied by the fire industrial complex? Where and how is it applied? Is it legal? Big fires are very big business with all the helicopters, air tankers, caterers with huge portable kitchens feeding thousands, shower trailers, sleeping trailers, communication systems, bulldozers, masticators, tool sharpeners, truck rentals, motel rentals, restaurant meals, airline tickets, structure protection crews, mileage for travel from all over the West, infrared-equipped aircraft, computers, printers, copiers, GIS systems, etc. etc. If Eisenhower were alive today, he might have to add a phrase to his famous warning: "Beware the fire industrial complex."

Who speaks for efficient, effective firefighting? How many highly paid lobbyists from the fire-industrial complex are pushing the Forest Service for bigger, longer fires? Who speaks for more efficient fire control and management? If an effective initial attack crew stops a fire when it is small, the millions of dollars that a big fire would have cost are saved, and the little fire doesn't even make the news. I suspect that being a fire boss and stopping a one-acre fire probably doesn't do as much for a person's resume as being a fire boss on a huge fire.

Resources

We absolutely need to get fire back into some of our forest systems in the Southwest, especially ponderosa pine and dry, frequent fire mixed conifer, but not under extreme burning conditions and not during the wrong time of year.

What resources are affected by fire under extreme burning conditions? Fires burn hotter and stand replacement is more extensive than under natural conditions. Hotter fires sterilize more soil and deeper. Areas that burned hot are more prone to flash floods and debris flows; streams are scoured, riparian zones destroyed, fish populations and other aquatic species lost.

Researchers in the Jemez Mountains of New Mexico are finding that the forests are being replaced by shrubs, not trees, due to repeated intense fires. Habitat for species that require mature and old growth forest is being lost.

For example, considerable potential habitat for Pacific marten (a State of New Mexico threatened species) has been lost to the Calf Canyon/Hermit's Peak Fire. Local flora and fauna (including plants, insects, birds, reptiles, amphibians, and mammals) are likely well-adapted to lower-intensity fires at the normal time of year, near the monsoon season. Allowing and encouraging fires under extreme burning conditions during times when natural fires would be rare (i.e., too dry for lightning) is likely negatively affecting many species. It would be difficult and expensive to determine all the direct, indirect, short-term, and long-term effects of current Forest Service firefighting policy.

Firefighting activities can have significant impacts – especially bulldozer fire lines. They are lines down to bare soil, often wide – approximately 300 feet – can go for miles and can be on steep slopes. Obviously, a lot of forest can be removed from dozer lines and erosion can become a significant problem, as well as forest fragmentation.

On the Calf Canyon/Hermit's Peak Fire, long, wide dozer lines have been constructed many miles from the actual fire. They may total around 50 miles of line. At 35 acres per mile of line, that is roughly 2,000 acres. Loggers have been called in to "harvest" the logs.

One very experienced firefighter commented that they may be useful for future fires. There will be future fires and the dozer lines may be useful,

depending on the fires, but with current Forest Service approach to fire, they likely won't matter. By building dozer lines miles from the fire but under the auspices of this fire as an emergency, they avoided any environmental analysis of the impacts (i.e., no NEPA), and perhaps kept a lot of heavy equipment busy and on the payroll. Will the possible benefits outweigh the impacts? I doubt it.

Public perception

I suspect most of the public thinks the Forest Service is fighting fires aggressively. They see the helicopters and air tankers flying around. It is an impressive show, even when no one is on the line to work with the water drops.

The public seems to erroneously think water drops put out the fire, which of course they don't. They see impressive smoke plumes that look nasty, but how many are from failed indirect burnout operations?

They see lots of hotshot crews and structure protection crews from all over the West. They see lots of bulldozers and other heavy equipment. There is a lot of activity. They hear the Forest Service public-affairs people explain how tough and dangerous the fire is and all that is being done to stop it and protect structures.

The Forest Service public-affairs folks have the increasingly difficult job of convincing the public that the Forest Service is doing aggressive and effective firefighting. They will need silver tongues as time goes on. "You can fool some of the people all of the time ..."

Local or national policy?

When the Calf Canyon/Hermit's Peak overhead team representative was asked if the Forest Service had a policy regarding fighting fire at night, the response was, "We're not Forest Service. We are interagency." When the Washington, D.C. office of the Forest Service was asked that question, the answer was, "We go by the 'Incident Response Pocket Guide.'"

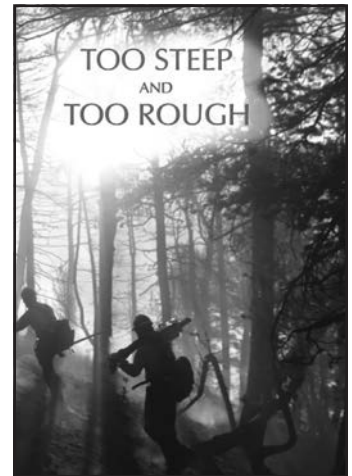
It seemed to me a straightforward question with a yes-or-no answer. They are apparently paid to avoid answering questions. So far, I have not found any policy in that guide about fighting fire at night. It seems likely, based on discussions with fire personnel and published fire accounts, that it is a national level policy or directive. Perhaps "bigger is better."

Anyone interested in what is currently going on in the Forest Service fire organization will enjoy reading **Murry Taylor's** (RDD-65) new book, *Too Steep and Too Rough* from Amazon.com. It explains a lot. 📖

"TOO STEEP AND TOO ROUGH"

A REVIEW BY CARL GIDLUND

This book is a critique of current Forest Service fire policy by author Murry Taylor, a 60-year veteran of fire suppression, both on the ground and as a smokejumper. It's billed as a novel because, I suspect, it includes an account of his relationship with a female firefighter. My review does not include details of that relationship but will concentrate on the salient points of his critique.



The very title of the book is an indictment of the policy which prevents initial attack during nighttime hours or when conditions are deemed too unsafe.

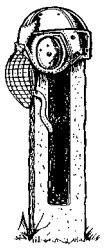
Indeed, he terms safety a "sacred cow" sometimes leading to fire crews merely watching as structures burn down. There are times, he claims, that calculated risks must be taken.

He also claims that many Forest Service fire overhead personnel are "marginally qualified" for the positions they occupy.

He cites a court order that requires women to be placed in management positions and that, in today's environment, ethnic diversity and the threat of sexual harassment are considered almost as important as fire suppression goals.

Among his criticisms is that crews are ordered off fires at night and "spike" camping near fires is discouraged, often times leading to huge fire camps. Crew debriefs don't occur often.

The very words "too steep and too rough" can be a prescription for a project fire. 📖



Off The List

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

Chuck Sheley
10 Judy Lane
Chico, CA 95926

Ronald J. Pond (McCall '66)

Ron, 83, died March 23, 2023, at his home in Pendleton, Oregon. Ron, an enrolled member of the Umatilla Tribe, was born at McKay Creek, Oregon December 6, 1939. He earned a degree from Eastern Oregon College in 1974, a teaching certificate from Oregon State in 1977, a master's from Oregon State in 1992, and a Ph.D. from Washington State University. Ron fought fires on the Umatilla NF 1963-65 and jumped at McCall 1966-69 making 44 jumps. Twenty-five of these were fire jumps. His son, Mitch, jumped at Grandeville 1990-92.

James Gordon Christensen (Missoula '61)

Jim, 84, died February 6, 2023, from pancreatic cancer. He was born September 9, 1938, in Bellingham, Washington. He attended the University of Montana studying Forestry but switched to Microbiology. Jim worked at the Deaconess Hospital, Spokane, Washington, for 39 years until his retirement. He was married to his wife, Darlene, for 59 years. He served as a Medic in the Army and jumped at Missoula during the 1961 season.

Monroe C. "Spud" De Jarnette (Missoula '49)

Spud, 93, died February 1, 2023, in Hillsboro, Oregon. He was born in Sandpoint, Idaho, May 1, 1929. Given his love of the outdoors and the fact that his Dad was a forester, he initially studied forestry at the University of Montana before switching to music. Throughout his life, Spud pursued his twin passions for the outdoors and music. While studying music in college, he was a smokejumper and jumped at Missoula 1949-52 and 1955. An active member of the NSA, he eventually served on its Board of Directors and volunteered to work on campgrounds and trails

until he was 90 years old. For much of his life, during summer seasons, he was a National Park Ranger in Glacier N.P., Montana (1960s) and a Mokelumne Wilderness Ranger (1960s-70s) in California. During winter seasons, he was a member of the National Ski Patrol at Boreal Ridge Ski Resort.

After college, Spud began his music teaching career in the Missoula public school system. In 1960, he moved to Sacramento, California, and began teaching music in the Grant School District. After many years teaching at Foothill High School, he retired from public school teaching during the 1980s. Passionate about youth orchestras, he co-founded the California Orchestra Directors Association and was a conductor of the Sacramento Youth Symphony.

In the 1970s, Monroe and his wife, Betty, moved to Auburn, California. His proudest accomplishments were the founding of the Auburn Symphony and the revitalization the Auburn State Theater. In 2000, he was recognized by Auburn with the McCann Award for outstanding community leadership and volunteerism. Spud, who was an Army Infantry Officer and a Korean War Veteran, is interred at the Willamette National Cemetery in Oregon.

Gary Palmer Romness (Missoula '62)

Gary died on January 28, 2023, in Norway where he had been living for the past 48 years. He was born and raised on a cattle ranch 20 miles east of Missoula near Clinton, Montana, where he attended grade school and later, was bused into Missoula for his high school education. He then attended Montana State University on a wrestling and a Clinton PTA scholarship. He was the Champion Showman of the prestigious Little International, was a member of Alfa Gamma Ro fraternity, plus a member of several other clubs and organizations, including MSU Flying

Club where he gained his flying license for single-engine planes.

Horses and cattle dominated a good share of his youth experiences, and Gary became an above average bareback and bull rider, participating in rodeos in many western states. Eventually he obtained a bachelor's in Agricultural Education and taught high school at Cascade and Conrad, Montana. His FFA coached teams won both state and national awards. He was also the head wrestling coach and had individual state champions. In 1975 he was named Montana's Outstanding Young Teacher by United States Steel.

Gary jumped at Missoula 1962-64, 69, and at West Yellowstone 1965, while attending Montana State University. In 1963 he made 24 fire jumps. In 1965, while jumping out of West Yellowstone, he jumped a fire at 12,300 feet in the Shoshone Forest.

Years 1965 to 1968 were spent as a Peace Corps Volunteer working with the Guaymi Indians in a remote mountain area of Panama. During the three-year period, Gary helped the Indians build a health center, school, small air strip, plus developing a spring for clean water. The project became a school of 800 students, doctors, nurses, dentists, library, church, serving a large population. Gary was nominated to the Balboa Peace Prize in 1968 and was awarded Beyond War Award for his efforts in the Peace Corps.

While teaching at Conrad, Gary and Else Marie Mollenhus, from Norway, were married. He had met Else while traveling Europe several years before. In the summer of 1975, they moved to Norway where Gary worked in the plastic industry.

Gary retired in 2005, 63 years old, so he could enjoy the good life of travel, skiing, hiking, fishing, and spending prime time of R & R at their mountain log cabin. However, at the age of 72, he became seriously ill requiring a seven-month hospital stay due to an acute infection of pancreas and lung failure.

Gary and wife moved to Fauske, Norway, which is above the Arctic Circle, to be closer to family. Playing with the grandchildren and fishing in the fjord for halibut and cod took up most of his time. Gary was an NSA Life Member.

John Roy Kirkpatrick (Grangeville '62)

John, 80, died January 24, 2023. He was born

in Bellingham, Washington, on April 18, 1942. His family moved to Albuquerque in 1950 and he graduated from Highland High School in 1960. He married Carolyn Chavez, a St. Pius girl, in 1963. They had two sons, John and Jason, while simultaneously attending Northern Arizona University, School of Forestry.

John graduated from NAU in 1966 and began a long, successful career with the USFS. During his career, he was a smokejumper, District Ranger (Flagstaff and Roosevelt, AZ), Forest Supervisor (San Juan National Forest, CO), Washington DC staff assistant (Long Range Planning), Fire Director (Southwest Region), and finally Deputy Regional Forester (Southwestern Region).

Among his many land management accomplishments in the Southwestern Region, John promoted major forest fuel management activities reducing fire hazards in Northern Arizona and New Mexico forests. John was known as a humorous, positive, thoughtful, no-nonsense leader with an uncanny ability to see through issues.

He was an avid hunter who reloaded his shells (sometimes called "duds"). He was an enthusiast and avid reader of Southwestern history, particularly the Santa Fe Trail in New Mexico.

He retired in Albuquerque and enjoyed many years camping with his adored grandchildren, hunting, traveling, and spending time on his Tome alfalfa farm with family. John jumped at Grangeville in 1962 and at Missoula in 1963.

Jonathan LaVon "Scotty" Scott (McCall '48)

Scotty, 92, died January 18, 2023, in Rancho Mirage, California. He was born on February 2, 1930, in Nampa, Idaho, and grew up in Homedale, Idaho, where he graduated from high school in 1948. A gifted athlete, he lettered in football, boxing, basketball, and track and accepted a football scholarship to the College of Idaho. Scotty graduated Magna Cum Laude in 1952 after three and a half years. His post-graduate achievements included the Advanced Management Program at Harvard University, the Aspen Institute, and the IBM Computer Executive Program.

While in college, Scotty jumped at McCall, making 30 fire jumps, including an impressive 14 fire-jump season in 1949. He ended his smokejumper tenure as squad leader in 1951. He carried the

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stories and friendships of his smokejumper career throughout the remainder of his life as some of his most cherished memories.

Scotty's military service began in the Idaho Army National Guard in 1952, after which he was recruited to work for the CIA. After two years in Asia, he returned home and went into the USAF as a fighter pilot. He completed his military service having broken the speed of sound in both the F-86 Saber and F-89 Scorpion fighter jets.

In 1955 Scotty started in the Management Training Program at Albertson, Inc. becoming President and CEO by 1965 at the age of 35. In conjunction with Skaggs drug stores, Scotty pioneered the revolutionary "combo" grocery/drug store that is the modern grocery store of today. Recruited to become CEO of The Great Atlantic and Pacific Tea Company (A&P), headquartered in Montvale, New Jersey, he ran what was at the time the largest retail grocery company in the United States. In 1980 Scotty started JLS Enterprises and also became a consultant for Saudi Arabian Prince Talal bin Abdulaziz and later his son, Prince Al Waleed bin Talal Al Saud, where they eventually built the largest supermarket chain in that country.

1987 found Scotty back in the corporate world as CEO of American Super Stores located in Pennsylvania. In 1988 he became the CEO of parent company American Stores, and with the merger of Lucky and Alpha Beta stores created the nation's then largest supermarket chain of some 567 stores. Scotty was an avid general aviation pilot, big game hunter, Harley rider, and risk-taking adventurer throughout his life.

John A. Holtet (Missoula '61)

John, 82, died January 10, 2023, in Missoula. He was born July 2, 1940, in Hamilton, Montana. John graduated from Darby H.S. in 1958 where he lettered in multiple sports. He met his future wife, Sandy, in high school and they were married in 1962.

John attended Western Montana College, Northern Montana College, and received a Liberal Arts Degree from the University of Montana in Education in 1964. He jumped at Missoula from 1961-1965.

John taught school in St. Ignatius, Montana, Dickenson, ND, and in Sunnyvale, California. John left the teaching profession in 1967 and joined a publisher of educational materials. Dur-

ing John's 33 years in educational publishing, he was with different publishers and traveled all over the United States and Canada. John's responsibilities during his career included being a sales representative, educational consultant, and regional manager for 13 Western states, three Provinces of Canada, Alaska, and Hawaii.

William Dinwiddie "Bill" Tucker (Missoula '50)

Lt. Col. William Dinwiddie "Bill" Tucker USAF (Ret.), 95, of Arlington, Virginia, died January 18, 2023. He was raised in Washington, DC, and graduated from Central High School in 1948. Bill graduated from the University of Maryland in 1953, where he was a Track & Field athlete competing in middle distance and hurdles, a football player, and a wrestler, with a degree in Physical Education.

In 1950, Bill went to Missoula, Montana, where he jumped 1950-52. He had ten practice jumps and nine fire jumps. Bill can also be seen in the 1952 film "Red Skies of Montana," working alongside Richard Widmark and Jeffrey Hunter. Until recently, he returned periodically to Montana for smokejumper reunions where

he would work on clearing trails and reminisce over cold bottles of Moose Drool beer with his friends.

In 1953, Bill joined the USAF Reserves, transitioning to active duty in 1961. He served as a USAF Military Pilot and Aircraft Commander with the 53rd Weather Reconnaissance Squadron (Hurricane Hunters) at Ramey AFB in Puerto Rico. In Vietnam, Bill served as a Pilot and Instructor flying C-123s and C-130s on transport and defoliation missions. After the war ended, Bill went back into the USAF Reserves, working at Andrews AFB with the 459th Congressional Wing until he retired as a Lieutenant Colonel in 1979.

The citation for the Distinguished Flying Cross notes how Bill successfully completed a high priority mission despite his aircraft sustaining significant damage. He also flew several transport missions during the Battle of Khe Sanh.

Received from Todd Hunter: "I am sending along respect on behalf of my father, the late actor Jeffrey Hunter, who worked with Lt. Col. Tucker on the film *Red Skies of Montana*. This is how I, my father, and Lt. Col. are connected—Smoke jumpers. Naturally, I am proud to be associated with such incredible heroes." 🇺🇸

NOT FORGOTTEN

Malvin L. Brown (Pendleton '45)

Malvin lost his life August 6, 1945, on a fire near Lemon Butte, Umpqua NF, Oregon, due to a fall from a tree. He was the first smokejumper to die in the line of duty.

A volunteer member of the newly formed all-black 555th Parachute Infantry Battalion—Triple Nickles, Malvin took paratrooper training at Fort Benning, Georgia, and later was trained as an Army medic. In May 1945 the 555th reported for duty in Pendleton, Oregon, assigned to combat wildfires—Operation Firefly.

A lightning bust in early August resulted in the Siskiyou Smokejumper Base being jumped out. With many fires still unstaffed, a request was made for 15 military smokejumpers. The medic normally assigned to this group was ill, Malvin volunteered to take his place despite not fully completing all

his smokejumper training.

Upon arrival in Medford, Oregon, area, these smokejumpers were sent north to the Umpqua NF, where the first group of six jumped two fires near the crest of the Cascade Mountains. The planeload with the remaining nine smokejumpers then headed to a much lower elevation fire in the tall timber country of western Oregon.

The fire was located south of the summit of Lemon Butte on a small side ridge. Although some timber jump training had been provided, it is unknown whether these smokejumpers carried the necessary length of letdown ropes needed for the 150 to 200-foot tall old-growth timber. What is known is that Malvin hung up in one of these tall leaning trees and was killed while attempting to reach the ground. His fellow smokejumpers carried his body out to a trailhead, arriving the morning of

August 8, two days after he had jumped.

Reports note Malvin fell approximately 150 feet into a rocky creek bed far below. Death was believed to be instantaneous, the cause officially listed as basal skull fracture and cerebral hemorrhage.

Malvin's body was escorted back to his family in Narberth, Pennsylvania. He was survived by his wife, Edna, his parents and family. He is buried in Mount Calvary Cemetery, Baltimore, MD.

Tim D. Hart (Grangeville '16)

Tim died June 6, 2021, because of injuries suffered jumping the Eicks Fire, Hidalgo County, New Mexico. A load of Silver City smokejumpers responded to the Eicks Fire the afternoon of May 24, 2021. Located on private land in the far southwest "bootheel" corner of New Mexico, the fire had spread slowly in rocky, ravine-type terrain with sparse vegetation. The spotter located a jump spot that was "open and grassy with a few scattered yuccas."

Noted in the spotter briefing was 400-yard drift and that "the opposing slope and drainages were rocky, especially as you moved down the drainage."

The Jumper in Command (JIC) on the first stick reported to the jump ship "there was a lot of wind up high," and it was "floaty down low...spotty final, tough to get out of the air...but had good luck working the slope down drainage."

Tim was the sixth jumper out, third in a stick of three. For reasons unknown, Tim ended up south of the jump spot and "landed on the side of the drainage, uphill into rocks the size of garbage pails." The JIC and Jumper #2 observed Tim's flight and impact and immediately raced to his location. Upon reaching Tim, the JIC requested trauma gear and shortly updated the situation to "Red critical...unconscious...weak pulse... need air ambulance with a flight nurse." Four of the seven smokejumpers on the ground were EMT's and quickly began stabilizing and preparing Tim for a medivac. An hour and fifteen minutes later, Tim was flown off the fire to a Trauma Center in El Paso, Texas, where he succumbed to his injuries nine days later.

The exact cause of Tim's difficulties on that jump remain unknown. However, the Eicks Fire Fatality Report stated that the first two jumpers in Tim's stick and the final two smokejumpers, as well as the spotters and jump ship pilot, all noted a significant change in air stability, winds, and increased turbu-

lence. The medivac helicopter pilot was challenged due to strong and shifting winds.

Tim, 36, was a 6th season smokejumper and West Yellowstone spotter and squadleader. He began his fire career in 2006 and had served on Forest Service and BLM engine and hotshot crews before becoming a smokejumper at Grangeville in 2016. He graduated high school in the Chicago area and earned a Forestry degree from Southern Illinois Univ.

He is survived by his wife, Michelle, his mother and sister.

Luke D Sheehy (Redding '09)

Luke was killed June 10, 2013, when hit by a falling limb on the lightning-caused Saddle Back Fire, South Warner Wilderness, Modoc NF, California.

Luke and two other smokejumpers responded to the single tree lightning fire, one of many sparked in the Modoc NF and Northern California during a two-day lightning bust.

While Luke, as Incident Commander, was talking with Dispatch about the fire size-up, the top of the large, burning White Fir tree broke off. After reassessing the situation, the three smokejumpers began work to put in a "scratch line" to encompass the fallen, burning tree top and encircle the ground fire. Aware that additional debris from the tree could fall, the three smokejumpers were hopeful the tree would burn itself out by morning.

A loud "whoosh" was then heard, and the smokejumpers saw a large limb fall and hit Luke. Both smokejumpers were EMT's and began immediately treating Luke. Communications were established with Dispatch stating the emergency and a medivac helicopter was requested. The jump ship also returned and five additional smokejumpers, with a trauma kit and oxygen, were deployed to assist. After being airlifted by helicopter, Luke was pronounced dead at the hospital in Alturas, CA.

Luke was born and raised in Susanville, CA, graduating from Lassen High School. He was an experienced outdoorsman and wildland firefighter. In addition to working for his uncle's logging company, Luke also served as a firefighter with CalFire and with the BLM as a member of the Diamond Mountain Hotshot crew. He was in his fifth season as a smokejumper, having rookieed at Redding in 2009. Luke was survived by his parents and two sisters. 🕊

Public Involvement

by F. Carl Pence (Associate)

During the first 10 years of my U.S. Forest Service career – the early 1960s – our relationship with the public we served was vastly different than it is today. It was locally and informally focused. Then, forest supervisors, district rangers, and their primary staff officers were expected to be involved in their local communities.

Performance rating elements specifically focused on community involvement – for example, being an active member in local “service organizations” like Elks and Rotary. Becoming a local youth leader in Scouts or 4-H clubs or serving in the local Parent Teacher Association really helped your rating.

This all changed with a plethora of environmental legislation during the 1970s. These new laws ushered in expanded public involvement requirements. They allowed the public to appeal, litigate, and stop actions if public involvement was judged inadequate. To respond, federal agencies added new positions to specifically address the new requirements.

These new requirements did not sit well with many who had been with the Outfit for a decade or more. Up to that point in time, we generally viewed ourselves as “non-political professionals” and felt we had license to practice our profession independent of public approval.

Others viewed this change as a positive career opportunity. I was in that group and became an assistant forest planner on the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest. Later, other opportunities arrived and I transferred to the Bridger-Teton Forest as planning staff officer in charge of NEPA, and NFMA implementation and public involvement.

To succeed, I needed to become adept in public involvement. That was good experience, and sometimes it was fun and funny. I want to describe some of those occasions.

We had published the draft environmental impact statement for the Bridger-Teton’s Forest Plan. The draft EIS was carefully reviewed by diverse

public interests. Involvement was intense. The forest is considered part of the “Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem,” so environmentalists and the recreation industry were very interested.

Geologically, the forest is part of an “Overthrust Belt” which had the potential of oil and gas production. The energy industry was actively doing explorative drilling to determine that potential. Timber potential supported three sawmills, and a couple communities depended on that for their primary source of employment. So, there was plenty of controversy in our long-range planning.

Interest was so high that we received about 9,000 responses to the Draft Forest Plan EIS. We used a formal content analysis process to document and respond to each letter. I didn’t have enough staffing to deal with that amount, so I hired temporaries from the local high school business class.

A female high school intern entered my office one day and needed assistance regarding one of the letters. She was embarrassed and blushing as she read it to me. It went something like this: “You simply cannot harvest that stand of lodgepole pine up Brush Creek. It offers a beautiful view of the Teton Mountains. My partner and I were so overwhelmed by the view that we had sex, and our son was conceived.”

Our content analysis had topics to record concerns on topics like timber, recreation, wildlife, energy development, etc. I could see her dilemma regarding where it might fit. I thought out loud, which added to her embarrassment: “We may not have enough information. If they were married, we could list it under recreation. If they were not married it could fit under wildlife. Let’s assume they were married.” She ended up getting a degree in public relations and communication and eventually became a district ranger.

We held public meetings regarding the Forest Plan Draft EIS in every community in the state and Idaho, which commonly used the Forest. At one meeting in Riverton, Wyoming, I was trying

to explain the relationships of elk hiding cover, road density, and hunting seasons and hunting quality – that is, does one have a hunting experience, or just go to participate in a “shooting gallery”?

A burly logger jumped out of his chair and stated loudly, “You’re full of bulls--t.” I paused a moment to form a response and was inspired to say, “You know, you may be right. I was holding a meeting in Jackson last week and an environmentalist accused me of the same thing on a different topic.” That took the emotion out of the situation and brought some laughs from the audience.

I added, “Yes, our science is not perfect. However, we do know that before we started roading and logging the lodgepole pine along the Gros Ventre Range above Grand Teton Park and the national refuge, 60 percent of elk migrating out of Yellowstone National Park passed through the forest on their way to winter on the elk refuge and 40 percent migrated through Grand Teton NP.

“Now, after our past roading and harvesting, that ratio has reversed. This has required the Park Service and national refuge to increase their controlled harvesting program to keep elk populations from becoming so high they can’t economically feed them in the winter. Herd density at the feeding ground has led to disease increases – e.g., brucellosis.”

I added there was a significant difference between the quality of hunting on the national park and refuge than offered on the forest. Hunting within the park and refuge was more like a “shooting gallery” than a “hunt.” That was part of the quality issue.

I finally escaped planner positions, but public involvement duties continued as I assumed line officer positions. Being area ranger on the Sawtooth NRA was a politically high-profile position; decisions regarding threatened anadromous fish, cattle use, and private land control held little humor and very controversial decisions. For example, the purchase of a 2,000-acre ranch to re-establish fish access to traditional spawning and rearing habitats.

As a result, I was becoming a controversial figure. Miners in the White Cloud Range and ranchers in Custer County were particularly upset with me. The ranchers had “banned” me from coming

to Challis (which I ignored), and miners were threatening to shoot me. So, I decided to transfer and became deputy forest supervisor of the Gila NF in southern New Mexico.

That forest was an epicenter for states’ rights vs. federal control of public lands. The Catron County Commission had passed county ordinances which said that if the USFS implemented a decision with which the commission did not agree, they could arrest and jail the deciding line officer.

To improve our relationship with the county, we hired an independent mediator to help devise a cooperative agreement, which improved the working relationship. That relationship got strained, however, with a court decision regarding livestock grazing permits. Environmentalists had sued the USFS regarding the reissuance of grazing permits which had to be reviewed and renewed every 10 years.

The decision was going to require a NEPA process for every renewal, which would include a formal environmental assessment or an environmental impact statement, depending upon the controversy associated with each allotment.

This requirement would create an immense process and workload for forests with large grazing programs, like the Gila. Such a process had the potential to simply close down grazing in forests with large livestock grazing programs. The Catron County Commission demanded a public meeting to explain how the USFS was going to meet requirements of the court decision.

I was acting forest supervisor at the time. The meeting was to happen in the county’s high school gym in anticipation of a large crowd. Regional staff came to present the region’s strategy to comply with the court decision. I was to open the meeting and introduce our speakers.

We anticipated it would be a very volatile meeting. We brought Forest Service law enforcement officers with us to help in case things got out of control. We had an escape plan and positioned our vehicles for a rapid escape. There were participants from many other western states at the meeting.

As I stood on the podium and looked across the gym, all I could see were cowboy hats and angry faces. I silently prayed for wisdom, then

opened the session by stating, "I appreciate everyone's concern about this issue. Those of us trying to respond to it don't like the decision any more than you do, so please don't shoot us. We are just messengers."

That seemed to disarm the negativity of the meeting, and we were able to present our strategy and leave unharmed. Later, that decision was appealed successfully, and we were able to reissue expired grazing permits without such an expensive process. However, livestock grazing continues to be a controversial issue on federal lands.

My next position as forest supervisor of the Malheur National Forest was a repetition of the controversy I had experienced. At the time, timber harvesting was the largest employer in the communities associated with the forest. I worked hard to improve USFS relationships with the locals by participating in local activities and attending county commission meetings. I tried my best to establish a positive image in the community.

An interesting public group formed while I was there. Deer and elk populations are high in Grant County, Ore., and many of them are killed during the winter as they cross the main highway down the John Day Valley. A local custom had evolved that when one came upon a recent roadkill, they stopped and salvaged choice meat, like

loin strips, from the dead animal. This salvage was against Oregon Wildlife Department regulations, and they took one of the salvagers, a popular local individual, to court and he won.

That coalesced the scavengers, and they formed a group to celebrate this activity by annually holding a "Roadkill Chili Feed." Because of all the issues in which I was locally involved, I became a regular speaker at the chili feed. It always turned out to be kind of a "roast," but not in a personal way; the negativity was generally focused on the USFS and federal government in general.

I invited my daughter Shelli to attend one of the chili feeds. At the time, she was seasonally working for the Forest Service on a fire crew and was staying with us that winter. I wanted her to experience the kind of stuff I had to deal with.

She was a very "buffed-out", attractive young woman due to the physical nature of her work. She dressed herself up for the event and sat up front during my presentation and questioning. When it ended several in the audience were moving up the aisle to personally ask me questions. Shelli jumped up, blocked them from doing so and loudly exclaimed, "My dad has answered all your questions. Now leave him alone!"

Later, one of the attendees came to me and said, "I'm sure impressed with your bodyguard. You need to take her with you regularly." 🦋

So ... Is There A Fee?

by Rod Dow (McCall '68)

The dog and I went for a good long walk today.
There was a trail I hadn't seen before.
A lovely, narrow creek led the way,
And so, she and I didn't seem to require much more.

••

Yet, even as we began our private trek,
A bitty little ray of sunlight poked out toward our
goal.

It kind of made me pause to check,
Dang, where do I pay my toll?

••

I've noticed that same sense of wonder,

So many times, along this short let.
The Mother's stunning scenes urge me to ask her,
If I'm a little behind on the debt.

••

I've seen full double rainbows at the stroke of mid-
night,
Lifted high over the Yukon from my own island
knoll,
Sitting with good brothers at a campfire in the late
arctic light.

Gee whiz, man, is there a slot where I pay my toll?

••

Have you ever flown close to monster thunderheads
Their anvils lined up so cleanly on a sunset row?
That one was out over the Seward's wide spread,
And a huge bull moose grazed in a pond down below.

••

A single ponderosa on the breaks of the Salmon,
Torches the entire length of the nighttime hole;
Wild, spooky shadows light up the canyon.
Holy shit, brother, please show me where I pay my
toll!

••

A clear vision still lingers from another hike with
my dog
That parked us by a trout-filled tarn in a tent,
Morning mist parted by blades of sun through the
fog.
Crap, aren't I a bit late on the rent?

••

Sure, I've tried my level best to be a good guy,
And I suppose done OK on the whole.
But I can't help but think I'm getting a pretty great
buy.
Please, won't you charge me a toll?

••

So, while it feels that I'm trespassing maybe a bit
In a world so much more wondrous than me,
I guess the great, wide universe just saw fit
To loan me a chunk of its sublime beauty for free.

••

Not exactly sure how I earned the great pleasure,
But this little stretch I've had has been quite a roll.
I'll never really think I earned such a treasure,
But something out there apparently picked up the
toll.

•••

*The dog and I went out this morning on a bright sunny
walk and this kind of came to me from that. The fact
that the exquisite comes at no charge has always amazed
me. The poem is dedicated to my boy, Julian, and the
inspiration was from conversations I had with two old
jumper Bros, Murry Taylor and Evan Simmons, right
before I wrote it.*

•••



Chuck Sheley, Rod Snider, Mike Bina. NSA Board Meeting March 2019. Rod, the helicopter pilot at the Higgins Ridge Fire, died May 4, 2023.

FIRE JUMPS IN ONE SEASON

In the April 2004 issue of Smokejumper magazine, Mark Corbet (LGD-74) started a column titled “Smokejumper Milestones.” It covered many categories. I would like to start updating Mark’s information. If you can add/update the information below, please contact information on page three of this issue. Expand the list to 20 fire jumps per season. (Ed.)

FIRE JUMPS IN ONE SEASON:

29-Bill Murphy	(Missoula-56)	1961
28-Bruce Yergenson	(McCall-54)	1961
28-Robert Turner	(Redding-99)	2001
27-Lynn Sprague	(McCall-59)	1961
27-Chas. Bull	(Missoula-57)	1961
27-Ted Mason	(NIFC-88)	1999
26-Fred Rensmeyer	(McCall-58)	1961
26-Ted Mason	(NIFC-88)	1994
26-Chuck Sheley	(Cave Jct-59)	1961
26-Shannon Orr	(Redding-92)	1999
26-Steve Price	(Missoula-95)	1999
26-Shannon Orr	(Redding-94)	2001

The Legend of Black Water Canyon

by Walt Wasser (McCall '79)

First published in Smokejumper October 2004, Walt Wasser's story is one that needs to be read again. From the Twilight Zone—(Ed.)

The legend of Black Water Canyon started in 1937 when 15 firefighters died in the canyon and many others were badly burned. It was a very dry year, and an unexpected gale-force wind arrived and trapped 50 firefighters that were on the mountain that day.

Today, a large memorial to the firefighters stands along the highway, 15 miles from the east entrance to Yellowstone N.P. A memorial trail leads five miles to the site where they died on the mountain. A beautifully engraved plaque lists the names of all the fallen firefighters.

I should have known more about this tragedy, but the disaster was almost unknown to me. I'm sure I had read about it, but I couldn't recall the details of the incident, perhaps because it happened so long ago or because I was new to the area. I was about to learn all about the Black Water Canyon and the mysteries and legends that surround it.

I was assigned to the Black Water Fire on August 19th, 2003. It was located in some of the most remote country in which I've ever fought fires. I was appointed Incident Commander of this 40-acre fire. Not only was it in a very remote section of the canyon, but there were also endless, solid trees all the way from the fire back to the highway, five miles away. Safety zones were nonexistent, and the trail only reached halfway to the fire before it disappeared into thick, downfall timber. Pine beetles had devastated the forest, killing up to fifty percent of the trees. The dead, dry, red needle snags were just waiting to burn; all they needed was a start, and there would be no stopping a potential firestorm. With the right conditions, the Black Water Fire was just the source that could completely burn the canyon and take anything and anybody that got in its way.

The FMO, **Chris Schow** (MYC-88), and I surveyed the fire from a Llama helicopter. Llamas are great for high altitudes, which is good since the top of Black Water Canyon is over 11,000 feet high. The more I saw of this fire and the more I learned of the canyon and its history, the more concerned

I became about putting people in there to fight it. I would need a small group of elite fire fighters to cautiously approach and attack the fire. I ordered a Type 1 Hotshot crew to take on the task.

The Craig Hotshots arrived that evening. The next day we would work our way to the fire and develop an attack plan. If the fire intensified at all, we would have to pull out. It just wasn't worth taking unnecessary risks.

The next morning was a carbon copy of the day before—clear, sunny, and hot. August 20 was a very significant date for fires throughout the Yellowstone area as it is the peak day for fires in the area. Over 200,000 acres burned in a single day on August 20, 1988. Also, the 1937 fire occurred in August!

The Craig Hotshots were eager to get started working on the fire. After all, it was in very beautiful backcountry, and the fire wasn't too large. I saw them drive by my campsite about 7 am on their way to the trailhead. The trailhead was marked with a memorial 30 feet long and 4 feet high honoring the brave young men of the 1937 crew that died. It was a gruesome reminder of the last Black Water Fire and reminded me to consider the fury Mother Nature can throw at you at any time.

There would be a cautious attack on this fire. We needed to get a feel for the fire and its' behavior. Lookouts would be flown in, scouts would lead the way, and the crew would follow. Today's objectives would be to cut a two-mile trail from the end of the established trail to the fire. Four saw teams would be used to clear a walking path to provide a quick escape route from the fire, down the trail, and out of the canyon. There was no place in the canyon that would provide survivable shelter if the fire decided to run. The only safe thing would be to run as quickly as possible down the trail. The people not on the saw teams were being used for lookouts or scouting the fire while helping set up camp.

The fire grew slowly over the next couple of days, and I became more comfortable being near it. I felt that I could safely bring a crew in and man the fire, which was located on the west side of Black Water Creek. Black Water Creek runs from south to north, and if the fire stayed on the west side of the creek, we would be safe. The top of the canyon was solid rock all the way to the ridge. The winds were pushing the fire into the rocks, creating a natural barrier to stop its advance. It was also creeping downhill

to the creek, and that is where we planned to stop it. The second it threatened to cross the creek, we would have to leave. If it crossed the creek, we would have to hightail it out of there quickly. We couldn't possibly control both sides of the creek with our limited resources.

I was devising a plan for the following day with the Craig Hotshots foreman. Like me, they were becoming more comfortable and were eager to get on the fire and do some good.

By day's end, I was feeling good about the fire. It hadn't grown too much, and we had a great plan. We were camping in some of the most beautiful country I had ever seen, and I had a great crew with which to work. Tomorrow would be a great day on the fire. I didn't know what a difference a day could make.

I awoke early on August 21 and remembered that this date was the 66th anniversary of the 1937 Black Water Fire. It weighed heavily on my mind. Everyone was still sleeping, so I walked up the memorial trail to the plaques that honored the heroic young men who died at the top of the mountain. It was a sobering walk through the old burn up to the monument. The old fire-scarred snags still stand as a testament to what can happen when fires burn out of control. I stood before the plaques and felt the presence of the firefighters from long ago. It was an eerie feeling, and I felt as though I was not alone. I was deep in thought as I walked back. When I arrived at the camp, the Hotshots had already left for the fire.

I walked to the fire and found the Hotshot crew busy cutting fireline, tying off natural barriers, and prepping the indirect line for burning out. As morning turned into afternoon, I was above the fire and could look back and make sure conditions were stable and the crew was safe. As the day wore on, the temperature rose, and the humidity dropped. I wasn't too concerned yet as the fire's behavior had not seriously worsened. There were a few single trees torching and some small runs being made uphill, but that was it. I was aware that conditions could change quickly and was on watch for any changes.

Then it happened! Suddenly, the wind came. It reached my lookout perch before it hit the fire. First, there was a gust of ten, then 20, then 30 mph. Conditions had changed in just a few minutes from stable to out of control. It was time to leave. We were no longer safe with the wind pushing the fire

up the canyon and spreading through the unburned beetle-killed trees. I called the Craig Hotshots foreman. They had already disengaged from the fireline and were retreating down the hill.

“Let me know when everyone is out and on the trail,” I told him.

“Will do.” He answered.

I needed to leave but not before I was certain everyone was safe. Soon, the foreman called and told me everyone was out and safe. Good! Now I can leave.

Then, disaster struck. The winds shifted and pushed the fire downhill and across the creek. The fire was now on both sides of Black Water Creek racing uphill, and I was above it. I felt the first pangs of panic as I watched my escape path being cut off as the fire quickly spread on the east side of the creek. I looked up. The only way out was to scramble up through the old burn of 1937. It was less dense than the rest of the forest even though it had grown back considerably. I started scrambling up the steep slope when my radio came to life and a voice called out, “Go back down to the creek. You can follow the creek to safety.”

I looked back at the creek and saw it was fully engulfed in flames. I thought, “Forget that. I’ll take my chances going up the hill through the old burn.” I started back up the hill and the voice came over the radio again.

“You have to trust me. Go back to the creek. I’ve been up through the old burn, and it is not survivable.”

I didn’t know who was calling, but he must have a better view than I had. So, I turned back and ran down to the creek. I got to the bank of the creek and found it was fully engulfed in flames and heading my way. I called back on the radio.

“I’m cut off. There’s no way out through the bottom of the creek.”

“Go down to the water. Trust me, it’s the only way out.”

I was quickly running out of options. I couldn’t believe I was trusting my life to the voice of someone I had never met or had never even seen. By now the flames surrounded me and I only had a few seconds left. I got down to the creek and found the flames on both sides of this steep ravine. The banks of the creek were on fire and the flames were over-lapping each other. They were approaching a part of the

creek that was slightly wider than the rest. When I reached the wide part of the creek, I found it full of solid smoke but no flames. The smoke was like a hole through the flames.

It was either now or never, there would not be another opportunity. I took several deep breaths and braced myself. I looked one last time down the creek, took three more deep breaths, held in the last one, and then took off running for the smoky hole in the middle of the creek. As soon as I ran into the smoke, I couldn’t see a thing. My eyes teared up, my nose started running, and my whole body felt like it was on fire. I put my arms over my head trying to protect my ears from burning. I ran on. I ran through the rocks and boulders along the creek trying not to stumble and fall. I ran with all my strength knowing that this might be my last act on earth.

As I ran, I thought of my family. How would they hear the news of my death? And how would I be remembered. Would I be remembered as a hero who bravely fought the fire to the end, or would I be remembered as the big idiot who foolishly got trapped by the fire? It didn’t matter now because it was almost over, one way or another.

I was running as fast as I could, but my legs were weakening. My lungs were about to burst, but I continued running. I was just about ready to throw in the towel when I saw the faint glimpse of an opening in the smoke. It was getting lighter and by a miracle, I broke through. I exhaled hard and took in the clean fresh air. I greedily gulped it and continued running. I ran down the creek, gasping for more air. It was wonderful. My strength was coming back to me, and I picked up the trail. I continued running down the trail trying to put distance between the fire and myself. My legs were giving out and I needed a short break. I really needed to drink water. I was completely dehydrated.

For the moment, I was safe. I could afford to drink some water and catch my breath. As I drank, I looked back at the fire and saw that the whole hillside of the 1937 burn was burning furiously. It was just one large orange fireball making its way to the top devouring everything in its path. If I had continued up the mountain, I would have been cremated.

“I see you made it,” the voice on the radio chimed in again.

“Yeah, thanks to you. If it hadn’t been for you, we wouldn’t be having this conversation right now,” I said gratefully. “What is your name anyway?”

“The name’s Clayton. Al Clayton.”

“Clayton, huh. Like the mountain.”

“Just like the mountain.” I could almost feel him smiling over the radio.

Clayton Peak was the tallest mountain in Black Water Canyon. It overlooks the entire canyon, and the Forest Service had installed a radio repeater on the top.

“Well, it is a real pleasure to meet you, Mr. Al Clayton. You might have just saved my life. I don’t know how to thank you. How did you know that going up the mountain was the wrong way to go and going down to the creek was the way out?”

“I’ve been up that mountain before and I knew that if a fire ever came running up there, no one would be able to survive it. I am very happy you are safe.”

“Well, I’m safe because of you. I owe you, my life.”

“Anytime, my friend.”

“Well, thanks again.”

I turned and headed on down the trail, facing an hour and a half hike out of the canyon to the trailhead. The gravity of the situation I had just experienced was starting to sink in. I was shaking and my near brush with death was getting to me. I stopped and threw up all the water I had just swallowed. I needed to keep moving. The day’s events were going through my mind. I replayed them repeatedly as I moved down the trail.

It was late afternoon when I reached the trailhead and caught up with the Craig Hotshots. The crew stared at me as I emerged from the canyon. I could tell that they were relieved to see that I had made it. The crew foreman approached me.

“We thought you were a goner. After we got out, we looked back and all we saw was the whole canyon on fire. We didn’t think anyone could possibly survive that holocaust.”

“I wouldn’t have survived if it hadn’t been for a lookout, or someone named Al Clayton who talked me down to safety. Do you know the guy?” I asked.

“Clayton? Never heard of him. In fact, there were no lookouts in Black Water Canyon. We tried calling you repeatedly on the radio but got no answer.”

I looked down at my radio and noticed that the

battery was dead. It must have died sometime when I was walking out. Funny, it was working when I was talking to Clayton.

I was confused. Who was this hero who saved my life? I walked over to the Black Water Memorial and was thinking how close I came to having my name added to the plaque. As I read the names, I truly understood the terror those young men must have felt just before they died. I was reading the names when I came to the last name. A cold chill poured through my body. The last name on the plaque was Alfred G. Clayton—Al Clayton. Confused, my mind couldn’t comprehend what I was reading.

With the events of the day and now this, it was just too much to take in. An old man had been watching me and I guess he could see the puzzled look in my face. He came over to where I was standing.

“I see you’re looking at the names on the plaque,” he said. I didn’t say a word.

“He was a hero, you know.”

I looked up at him. “What”

“I said he was a hero, Alfred Clayton.”

He got my attention and I looked at him as he told the story.

“He was on the Black Water Fire of 1937 when all hell broke loose. He was down by the creek and could have easily escaped by following the creek down to safety. His men chose to run uphill and try to outrun the fire that way. He turned around and ran up after them trying to turn them around. By the time he caught up, it was too late. They all died together on the mountain. A real shame. All those young men had their whole lives ahead of them. They named a mountain after him--Clayton Peak. Legend has it that he is still up there keeping watch over all the other firefighters. People say he is up there making sure the tragedy of 1937 never happens again. “Yes sir, ol’ Al Clayton, he’s a real hero. You ever heard of him?”

“Once,” I said. “Just once.” 🔦

Wally retired September 2011 after 39 years as a wild-land firefighter, including 33 years as a smokejumper with 395 fire jumps. He began fighting fires in 1973 in California, moving on to join engine and Hotshot crews in the Sierra N.F. before joining the McCall Smokejumpers in 1979. He moved to the Boise NIFC crew in 1987.