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# Smokejumper Magazine, April 2001

National Smokejumper Association

Paige Houston

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THE NATIONAL SMOKEJUMPER  
ASSOCIATION

QUARTERLY MAGAZINE  
APRIL 2001

# SMOKEJUMPER



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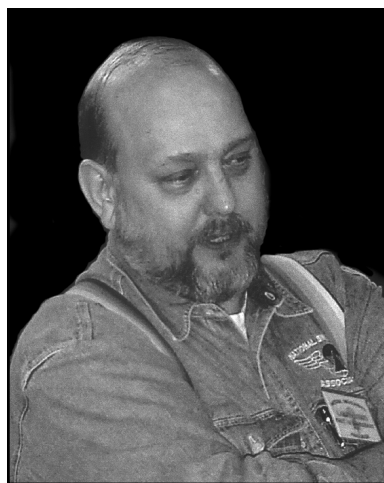
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Cover photo: "Mouse" Owen and Clark Noble at McCall in 1981. (courtesy of Troop Emonds)

# Observations From the Ad Shack



by **Larry Lufkin**  
(Cave Junction '63)  
PRESIDENT

ALASKA SMOKEJUMPER DAVE Liston's death sparked a quick reaction from his friends and associates within the Alaska smokejumper community. The Alaska crew contacted the NSA Executive Committee and asked if the NSA would administer a "Dave Liston" fund. The Fund would be used to support smokejumper families in the event of an accident or death of one of our comrades.

Your NSA Board of Directors agreed, at last summer's meeting, to administer and support the fund. We followed with a brief request for donations in the October issue of *Smokejumper* magazine and thus far have received donations from the California Smokejumpers and Jerry Dixon (McCall '71). To further help get the Fund started, your Board agreed to match the first \$1,000 of donations.

Here's what needs to happen next to further advance this Fund. First, we need to select a

person who will chair the Dave Liston Fund Committee.

Second, we need veteran and currently active jumpers from the various bases to serve on this committee, who will set up rules and procedures governing its purposes and uses. They will review and approve all applications for grants from the fund.

Third, we need to solicit donations to the fund to build it up to a reasonable and workable amount. Frankly, the larger the fund, the larger our grants to jumper families will be. I encourage all smokejumpers to respond to this request.

If you would like to serve on the committee, please contact me at (360-459-2534).

If you would like to donate to the Fund, send your check, cash, or money order to: Dean Longanecker, NSA Treasurer, PO Box 643, Waterville, WA 98858-0643. Be sure to note that your donation is for the Dave Liston Fund. Because the NSA is administering the fund, all donations are tax deductible. ☺

*Larry Lufkin can be contacted at: [JUMPERCJ63@aol.com](mailto:JUMPERCJ63@aol.com)*

**Deadline for  
articles, news  
and  
features for  
the July issue  
of  
*Smokejumper*  
is April 15**

# The Ride of My Life

by Paige Houston (Fairbanks '95)

**T**he article written by Jerry Dixon (*Smokejumper* April 2000), describing his experience with a double-malfunction, triggered a response in me of how precious life is and how quickly it can end. Until you feel death knocking at your door, the sensation is unfathomable. I sustained a malfunction and am reliving those painful 52 seconds through Jerry's story.

On July 27, 1996, I made my 37th jump on a fire in Northern California that turned out to be my last as a smokejumper. This 52-second ride should have put me in a pine box six feet under. I refused to believe this as I began my running routine two months and three days after the accident, which caused a broken back, and which the doctors told me should have caused paralysis.

There are instances where we don't realize how close we come to death and I was suffering from major denial. Maybe that explains the vertigo that plagued me during refresher training the following season. The constant dreams that I have of jumping or falling haunt me to this day. Needless to say, I choked and did not jump during the refresher training. Smokejumping was over for me and I wanted it back so



Paige Houston 1996. (courtesy of Paige Houston)

badly I could taste it. I still do and hope someday I will be jumping again.

The hard work prior to being accepted to smokejumping felt wasted. Before I applied, I had spent seven seasons with a hotshot crew and grew up on a ranch in the boonies of Dubois, Wyo. Both took self-discipline, which I thought would help me function as a successful smokejumper. Being snowed in six months out of the year, having no central heating or television and snowmobiling to the school bus at 20 degrees below zero was just a way of life.

I was on top of the world July 27 and I had so much to look forward to in life. I had just met the love of my life eight days earlier and, little did I know, we would be married in May of 1998. My husband, Doug Houston, supported me in getting through extremely tough times when it would have been easy for him to walk away. My anger and frustration consumed me.

My life was different now. As the painful ache in the pit of my stomach returned with flashbacks of the wonderful memories of Alaska, I wanted to go back and change that day. After the accident, all of the Alaska bros took me under their wing and I truly felt like a little sister. Base Manager Tom Boatner, now state director of Fire and Aviation for Montana, gave me a positive outlook on life. I feel honored to have jumped under Tom's leadership.

Looking back I have so much for which to be thankful. Special thanks to Boise jumper Gary Sexton, who packed my reserve that opened so fast. I was falling at 120 feet per



Doug and Paige Houston married May 1998. (courtesy Paige Houston)

second as I deployed my reserve at about 900 feet. As the reserve started to deploy, I hit a 130-foot Douglas fir, which collapsed the reserve but slowed the descent.

I kept saying to myself: "Stay as streamline as possible, don't get inverted in the branches, and do one hell of a roll." My roll was more accordion-style, fracturing my L1 and L2 vertebrae and my left ankle. My sternum was bruised from hitting every branch on the way down through the tree. This might have been the only instance in my life that I felt like smoking a cigarette in celebrating the joy that I was still alive.

I knew that in order for me to move on with my life and let go of the dream of returning to smokejumping, I had to make one more jump. I had to get back "on the horse" if I were to survive in life. Something had to change because I was self-destructing. I hated my favorite things in life. I was unmotivated, depressed and argued with everyone. At times, I questioned why I had walked away from that accident. How could my life that was going so well seem to be falling apart? I would not know the answer until I made that jump.

Doug and I located a skydiving center in Enumclaw, Wash. As we drove to the Kapowsin Air Center, he said, "I'm with you every step of the way." I could not have done it without his support. Upon arriving at Kapowsin, I became

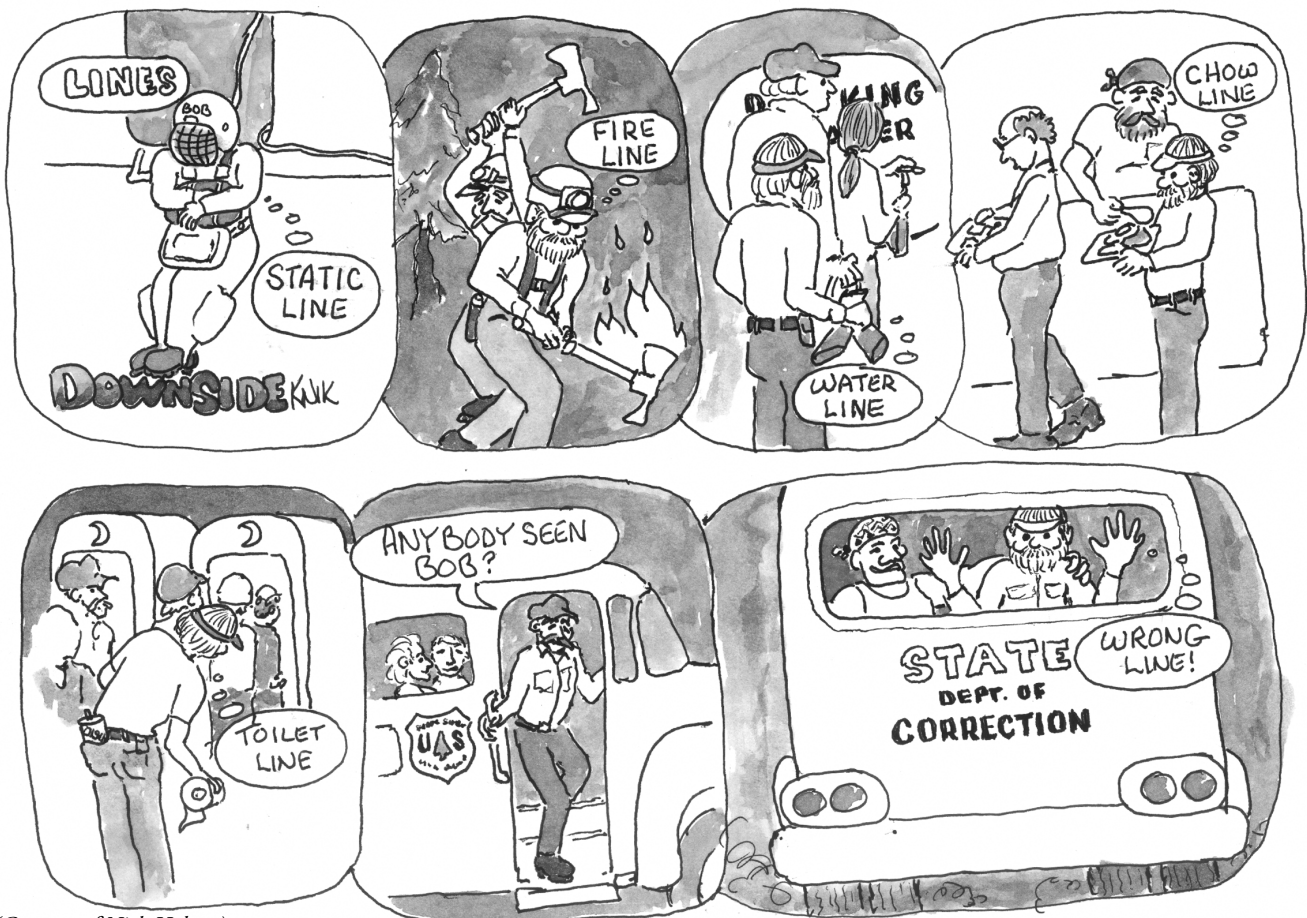
overwhelmed with anxiety, sweaty palms, dry mouth and had to make several trips to the john. However, I was focused and on a mission and had dreamed of this day for the past few years.

After completing four hours of training, we climbed into the Cessna 206. Because of my size, I would exit last. My turn came and I climbed out on the strut 3,000 feet above the ground. Doug had exited on the prior go around but his words were fresh in my mind- "Don't look back."

As I climbed out on the strut, the built up anxiety seemed to fade. On the spotter's signal, I stepped back off the strut. It felt like my first jump during rookie training into Farmer Brown's field just outside Ft. Wainwright.

The ride was much longer than 52 seconds, actually four minutes. I had made one more jump. The weight suddenly lifted off my shoulders! I attribute my ability to move forward to what I learned in Alaska. The bros and Sandy Ahlstrom-Romero have left a deep impression in my heart that I will never forget, and will take with me forever.

*Paige is married to North Cascades Base Manager Doug Houston. Doug retired January 3rd and they hope to move to Montana where Paige has hopes of obtaining a fuels position with the Forest Service.*



(Courtesy of Nick Holmes)

# Virtual Reality Parachute Simulator

by Ted Burgon (Idaho City '52)

**E**arly this past summer I accepted the invitation of Mark Corbet, trainer at the Redmond Jump Center, to look at the newly arrived Virtual Reality Parachute Simulator (VRPS). Then with the explosion of a new fire season, we had to put further discussion on hold.

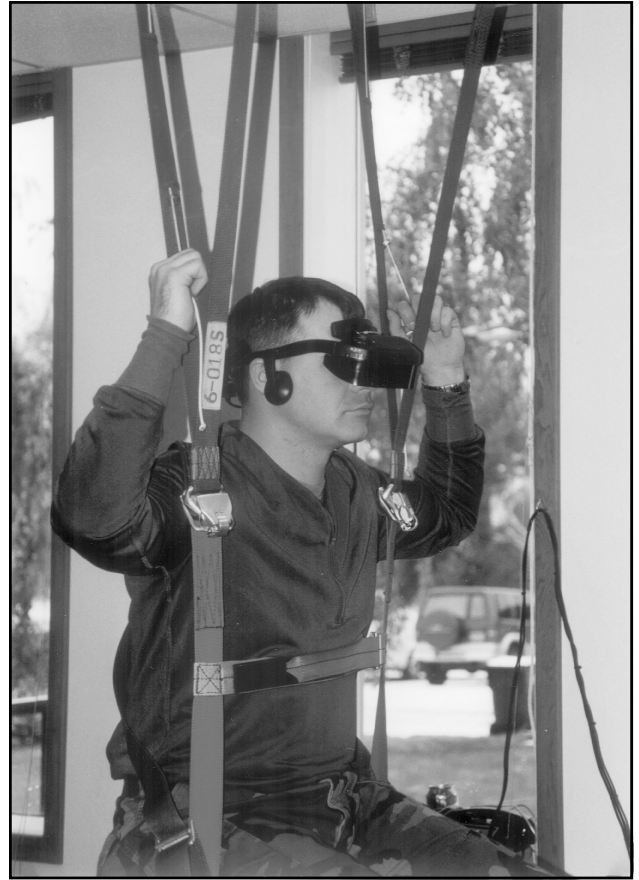
Mark phoned last week and asked if I had time to come up and look at the system. When I arrived the following day, a group of 15 Special Forces soldiers from Fort Lewis were using it. I talked with several of them about the system and they spoke very favorably of the simulator. Most of them had a number of static line jumps with conventional chutes but this was their first time to use the VRPS program and a toggled controlled chute.

After watching and taking several photos of them using the equipment, which incidentally is a great way to use inter-agency resources, I was given an opportunity to "jump."

VRPS was developed over 10 years ago to meet the needs of canopy control training in the classroom. Once into the "harness" that includes risers and toggles, the jumper is fit with a head-mounted tracker and display. A set of built-in earphones allows wind and other programmable sounds to be heard. The jumper is now "suited up." The operator then selects one of seven jump options. In addition, the program has the use of one of three sizes of FS-14 chutes, depending upon the jumper's weight.

Redmond has modified the standard harness using a "swing" type seat. This allows the jumper the opportunity to focus on the jump without the discomfort of a harness, as most jumpers use the VRPS up to 15 minutes at a time.

One option allows the operator to change the jump zone to any of five spots while the jumper is descending. Other options must be programmed in prior to the jump. The simulator allows for programmed variations of wind speed, wind direction, and terrain difficulty. Most jumps are from 1,500 feet, but can be set for any altitude. The jumper monitors his descent using a small pair of "feet" that move across the visual reality screen. The operator, as well as the other assembled jumpers, has the use of various monitors. Anticipation and confidence are enhanced by making the simulated training jumps and being able to watch and listen to the comments of the jumpmaster while sitting and observing the monitors.



*A member of a Special Forces team in his "jump bubble." (courtesy of Ted Burgon)*

There is nothing like a few wisecracks by team members to motivate a jumper to work a little harder. A very real value is the training the VRPS affords without twisted ankles and other injuries.

After exiting the aircraft the jumper can check for an open canopy with a twist of their head. The jumper then can turn their head in either direction and have the panorama in view. The horizon is visible, a look downward shows the forest and hopefully the jump spot. Scanning the sky for a jump partner can be done quickly by just a turn of the head. For the first few jumps a long thin red arrow gives wind direction. This feature can be turned off at any time. In the upper corner of the Visual Reality screen the remaining height is clicked off.

Watching the "little feet" and then flying them to the jump zone and the landing spot then becomes the focus. A jumper's concentration can be interrupted by the jumpmaster asking, "Where is your jump partner?" or other questions. A quick scan locates the jump

partner and the focus returns to the landing spot. One of the benefits of the system is it gives the jumper an opportunity to realize the time it takes from 1,500 feet to touch-down and what has to be accomplished in that short time span. It gives a very real sense of timing.

Another value is the jumpmaster can instruct the jumper in various procedures during the descent and if necessary terminate the jump and re-run it, allowing the jumper, as well as the rest of the class, to focus on any suggestions or comments.

At the end of the jump a critique can be held. The VRPS operator can replay the jump on the monitors using:

1. The jumper's view.
2. Any selected view or angle using the joystick.
3. Graph views or above that demonstrate the actual descent pattern.

This presents a unique self-study opportunity for the jumper and the observers, as the jumpmaster comments.

I asked Mark about the number of jumps or amount of time each jumper is accorded. He indicated

that there is no defined time/jumps but every effort is made to thoroughly train new jumpers on the system. The VRPS allows use day or night and on weekends; all that is required is a qualified systems operator and willing jumpers. Unlike a plane there are no additional costs for a pilot, fuel, insurance and maintenance.

The only drawback I can see is the limited peripheral view, which is a minor problem. One can only hope that as the VRPS software increases in sophistication the USFS will upgrade its training programs to keep current with software upgrades. By sharing the programs among various government agencies as demonstrated at Redmond the cost per person should be reduced and its value increased as a training tool.

I am looking forward to the next version of the VRPS program as I can imagine everyone who has used it is. 🍄

*Ted grew up in Pocatello, Idaho. He was a tank officer in the Marines and an educator for the past 22 years living and working in seven countries. Ted is currently living in Sunriver, Oregon.*

## Two-Man Stick on the St. Joe

by Philip A. Robertson (Missoula '62)

It was in 1963, my second year of jumping, that I had my most-interesting jump.

We got a call in the afternoon, and loaded up the Doug and headed to the St. Joe for a fire that was burning pretty hot. I had a funny feeling about that jump, for some reason, but could not pin it down. We got to the fire, and all I could see below was a pretty good smoke and lots of forest that looked "weed-patchy."

The jump spot was in a drainage bottom with a lot of willows and small trees here and there. They started dropping us and my stick was toward the end. Jim Cyr, a new man, was behind me in the stick. When I jumped, I waited for the anticipated feel of a "good opening."

Wrong! It did not feel right. I checked my canopy and—lo and behold—it was indented in the middle with the leg of a person draped over one side! Clearly, we had an interesting situation.

I yelled: "Hey! Get off my chute!"

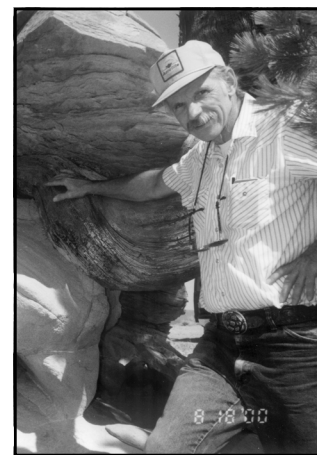
The somewhat-subdued and muffled reply was, "I can't!"

I did not have a full canopy because my lines were

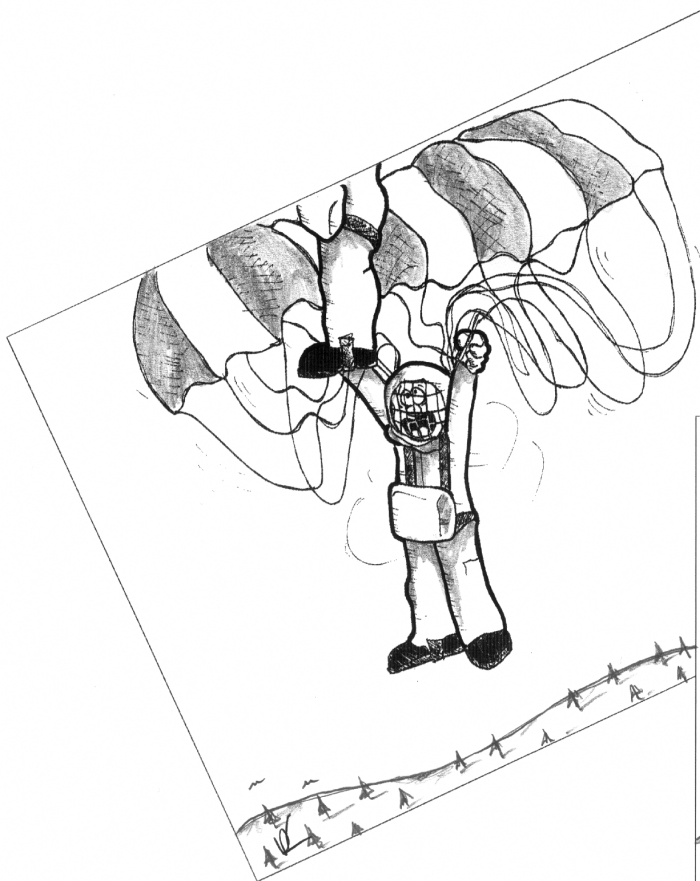
twisted and we were spiraling fairly rapidly. Within minutes, I heard that awful sound of nylon rubbing against nylon, and there he was, hanging beside me all tangled up in lines with his feet sticking straight out. He pulled his knife and said: "I'm going to cut these lines."

I replied: "No! Don't! You might cut the wrong ones."

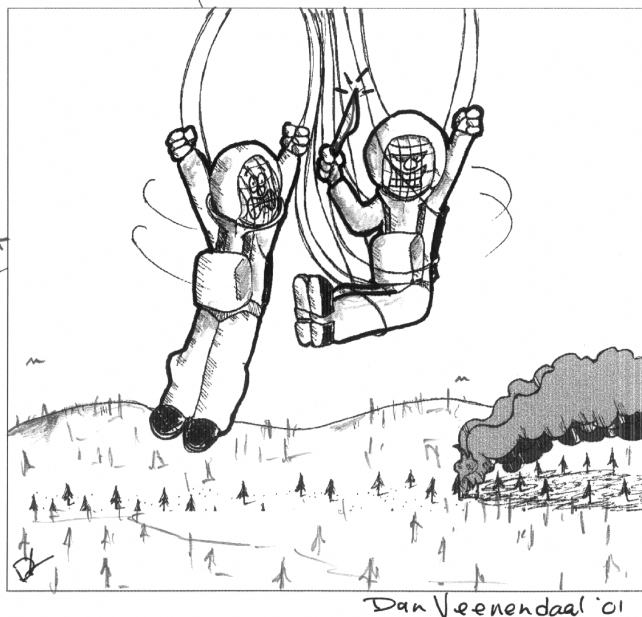
Below I could see the little white faces of the other jumpers peering up at us anxiously and could barely hear them yelling, "Pull your reserve! Pull your reserve!" I pulled it and threw it out so it would catch air, but since we were spiraling down, it merely drifted down aimlessly and wrapped around my legs. I don't think Jim could get at his because of the tangle



*Phil Robertson.  
(courtesy of Phil Robertson)*



(courtesy of Dan Veenendaal)



of shroud lines.

We continued to spiral downward, two tangled men with a partial canopy. We must have been in favor with the good Lord that day because about 40 or 50 feet above the ground, we separated, both got good air and full canopies and we drifted in for no less than near-perfect (in our opinions!) landings.

One of the jumpers on the ground and a roommate of mine, George Claggett, had a Keystone wind-up 8mm movie camera. When he saw the catastrophe unfolding, he started to take pictures. Unfortunately, he had not rewind the spring and missed the first part of this debacle. He gained sufficient composure to wind the camera and took a picture of about two-thirds of the descent. I have it on 8mm film and copy of it on videotape. Neither film is of high quality because, like these old bones of mine, time has taken its toll.

During the whole episode, I felt reasonably calm, which is a good testimony to the way we were trained

as jumpers. However, about 30 minutes later, after I began to really think about what had happened, my legs started shaking and the whole night on the fire line was one of post-trauma anxiety. I don't remember how I felt about my next fire jump, but I guess it wasn't too bad because I did it!

This is how I remember the event; it would be interesting, after almost 40 years, to see how Jim remembers the event. 🧐

*Phil was born and raised in Silver City, New Mexico, where he became interested in smokejumping when he worked for several summers as a packer for the Forest Service. He graduated with his B.A. and masters from Colorado State University and rookied at Missoula in 1962. After obtaining his Ph.D. in 1968, Phil has been teaching ecology at Southern Illinois University for the past 30 years. He plans to retire in two years and move to Red Lodge, Montana, and Silver City, New Mexico. He currently lives in Carterville, Illinois.*



# Sounding Off From the Editor



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

THE RESPONSE I GET from the readers is fantastic! I'm glad you appreciate and enjoy *Smoke-jumper* magazine. Your enthusiasm to sit down and pen a story, or mail me a bit of information about a jumper, keeps the flow going to the readers. Do you have a story that you want to tell? Take the time to write it and get it to me. However, I do need your help. If you do not have a computer, please make arrangements to have your article typed. If you can e-mail it or submit it on a document, it is easier for me to put into the magazine. Most jump stories are edited down in length. Wonder why?

I'm taking another step forward and soliciting advertisement for *Smokejumper* magazine. Our publication is of sufficient size and professional quality that I feel the next step can be taken. We mailed over 1800 copies of the January 2000 issue at 48 pages. The 1999 January mailing was 1400 copies at 24 pages. All

of my time and that of those individuals listed on the inside page is completely volunteer. The only costs to the NSA are incurred with the layout and mailing. The more I work with Larry Jackson at Heidelberg Graphics, the more I appreciate his abilities to make the magazine look so good and reproduce our pictures with such high resolution.

**How about you as a NSA member stepping forward and advertising in *Smokejumper* magazine?** Your business card can

be run in four issues for \$100.

The important idea here is to show your support for the magazine and the NSA. Please fit *Smokejumper* magazine into your advertising plans. That step will help us to continue with the expanded publication.

Look for your Board of Directors ballot inserted in this magazine. The elections process is very important. Please take part. Last year we had an increase in voters tripling the number of voters who took part in the 1999 election. 🗳



(courtesy of Bob Webber)

This group met in November for coffee and a few silk stories in Boise at the Hidden Springs Resort. The group consists of past smokejumpers, pilots and friends. They meet at 10:00 A.M. on the second Wednesday of every third month. **Andy Glen "Ace" Nielsen** is the coordinator and invites anyone with a story to attend. Don't be surprised if an individual like **Kenny Roth** from Missoula who was both a jumper and pilot shows up! Call "Ace" if you want more information.

(L-R) **Charles "Hawk" Blanton** (McCall '47), **Dr. Bill Mullins** (McCall '51), **Bernie Nielsen** (McCall '47), **Monte Brooks** (McCall '48), **Bob Webber** (Missoula '62), **Andy Glen Nielsen** (McCall '46), **Bobby Montoya** (Idaho City '62), **Ray Mansisor** (McCall '46), **Leo Compton** (McCall '47), **Austin Young** (McCall '54), **Leo Cromwell** (Idaho City '66).

# Army Honors Smokejumper's Leadership Weekly

by Carl Gidlund

**O**ne smokejumper's leadership is recognized nearly every week of the year.

The top non-commissioned officer graduate in each class of the Army's jump school at Fort Benning, Ga., receives an award in honor of 1<sup>st</sup> Sgt. Walter Morris, the first black paratrooper in the U.S. Army and a National Smokejumper Association member since 1995.

Walter's actions nearly 60 years ago helped set in motion forces that swept away 200 years of custom that prevented black and white soldiers from serving together. Here's what he did and why he's honored:

Jobs were virtually non-existent in Walter's hometown of Waynesboro, Ga., in the late '30s and early '40s. For two years after his high school graduation, he had tried to make it as a bricklayer, but there was little money for construction in those Depression years. The Army was one of the few options open to the 20-year-old, so he joined in January 1941, a one-year volunteer.

Based on his test scores, Walter was made a classification clerk, and since he wouldn't be in a combat assignment, he wasn't sent to basic training. His job was to test and interview other young black men who were entering the Army through its Fort Benning, Ga., reception center, then assign them to one of the few fields open to blacks. At the time, most were sent to port or stevedore companies, the quartermaster corps, or service companies.

The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor negated his one-year enlistment. Like most soldiers, he was "in for the duration" of the war.

In 1943, Pfc. Morris entered the 13-week infantry officers' candidate school. But with no previous combat training—he'd never before fired a rifle—he washed out during his twelfth week.

After looking over his records, the OCS review board suggested that Walter take an assignment at Fort Benning, study the subjects in which he was deficient, then reapply. He volunteered for the parachute school's service company. By virtue of the fact that he'd completed three months' officers' training, he was promoted to buck sergeant.

"With the exception of the commanders, all washouts from the parachute school, the company was black. There were 150 of us, and all we did was guard parachute school property, from 1600 to 0800 every day. Morale was terrible, but, fresh from OCS, I saw some things that I could do to improve it," Walter remembers.



*L-R Joe Murchison, president 555th, Richard Green and Walter Morris taken at the Redding Reunion June 2000. (courtesy of Walter Morris)*

He wrote a plan that would transfer the acting first sergeant to supply duty, make Walter first sergeant, and establish a training regime for the unit. His commander approved it. Then, the new first sergeant asked for volunteers to join him in a daily two-hour regimen of physical training, emulating the actions of the white parachute school students.

"Everyone who wasn't on guard duty fell out when the white soldiers returned to their barracks," he says. "We did pushups, ran in formation, even jumped from the mockup fuselages. After three to four weeks, we got pretty proficient, even in the 'fluid roll' parachute landing falls. And we got pride. It showed in our soldiers' personal appearance, their attitude."

One evening, the school commander, Gen. Ridgley Gaither, drove by the practice field.

"He saw 50 black soldiers jumping up and down shouting, 'One thousand one, one thousand two,'" Walter says. "He didn't know what to make of it, so he called me to his office. When you're summoned to the commanding general's office, you're naturally concerned, but then he asked me to explain what my soldiers were doing. When I did, he told me the secret of all secrets. There was going to be a black parachute company in the United States Army, and he asked if I'd like to be its first sergeant. I was elated. My heart almost burst.

"Here we were, a separate society. Black soldiers in uniform were denied access to the post exchange and main theater. We couldn't go, even in uniform, but the German and Italian prisoners who were stationed there could walk

into the exchange and buy a Coke or cigarettes. When we were told the Army was going to start a black parachute company and we would be trained as combat soldiers, it was a great, great moment.”

The 555<sup>th</sup> Parachute Infantry Company was activated on Dec. 30, 1943. The following month, 19 volunteers joined Walter at jump school. Two were hurt, one refused to jump, and one was delayed for a week when he went home to attend his mother’s funeral.

But the rest graduated with 1<sup>st</sup> Sgt. Walter Morris. They became the training cadre for six black officer volunteers. More enlisted men volunteered until there were enough to form three companies and designate the 555<sup>th</sup> a battalion.

Walter returned to OCS, graduated in August 1944, then was sent to the Adjutant General School, the only black student in his class. When he returned as battalion adjutant to the “Triple Nickles,” as they’d dubbed themselves, the unit was training for combat. But decisions by Generals Dwight Eisenhower, Mark Clark and Douglas MacArthur denied them their chance for battlefield glory.

“They were fighting the Germans and Japanese and didn’t have the stomach for other battles, those they feared would erupt between black and white soldiers,” Walter explains.

But there was another “war” they could fight, this one on the home front.

The West was in trouble. The spring of 1945 was hot, the manpower pool was low, and the Japanese had begun launching into the jet stream balloons carrying firebombs. Those were dropping onto forests and grasslands from Canada to Mexico, and an already dangerous fire season was threatening to become catastrophic. The Forest Service asked the Army for help.

The 450 men of the combat-ready Triple Nickles were given the assignment, then dispatched on a six-day troop train trip to Pendleton, Ore. There, they learned bomb demolition techniques from Army specialists, and Forest Service personnel taught them how to dig fire lines and to jump slotted 28-foot “Derry” chutes. Some were sent to establish a smokejumper base at Chico, Calif., but most remained at Pendleton Army Airfield, the battalion headquarters where their Air Corps C-47 pilots were stationed.

Walter remembers that, while the Forest Service appreciated their contributions, most civilians and a few military personnel didn’t.

“There were only 12 to 15 black families in the area, and we were permitted to visit just one restaurant and two bars. Also, the pilots’ CO didn’t want his officers associated with ours.”

Triple Nickle troopers made 1,200 jumps on 43 fires that season, plus several exhibition jumps to promote war bond sales. One also became the first smokejumper fatal-

ity. On Aug. 6, 1945, Pfc. Malvin Brown fell from a 150-foot tree during a letdown on a Siskiyou National Forest fire.

Walter recalls that the Army pilots dropped jumpers in sticks of 10 to 12, even on fire jumps, making it “very challenging” to guide chutes into tight spots.

Because of his duties as battalion adjutant, 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. Walter Morris jumped only one fire, leading a group of 35 to a blaze near Tillowack Lake on the Mt. Baker National Forest. His after-action report notes that three men were injured on the jump—a crushed chest, broken leg, and popped knee—but the able-bodied survivors fought the fire for four days before marching 23 miles to a trailhead.

The fire season over, the battalion returned to Camp MacKall, N.C., in September 1945. World War II had been won, and Lt. Morris had accumulated enough points to be discharged the following January.

He returned to his civilian trade, first in North Carolina, then New York where, in 1960, he became the first black bricklayer foreman in the state. He eventually worked up to project supervisor, remodeling brownstones in the Bedford-Stuyvestant section of New York City. He retired for a year in 1983, returned for another year, then quit work for good in 1985 and moved to Palm Coast, Fla.

Walter is twice a widower. His first wife died in 1979. His second, whom he married in 1980, passed away in 1999. Daughter Patricia is a law professor at Howard University in Washington, D.C. Another, Crystal Poole, lives near him at St. Petersburg Beach where she’s a health department administrator and counselor. Grandson Michael is following in grandpa’s tracks. After earning his engineering degree from Michigan State, he’s a logistician with the Army at Fort Irwin, Calif.

At 80, Walter is still a picture-perfect first sergeant. He’s an erect 6-foot-2, and so articulate that he’s often tapped to tell the Triple Nickles’ story. You may have seen him interviewed by Tom Brokaw on NBC’s evening news program, on the History Channel, or in the Triple Nickle’s own video, *Nickles from Heaven*.

And he’s proud, not only of his military and civilian accomplishments, but also of his stint as a smokejumper. He and two fellow Triple Nickles, association president Joe Murchison and Dick Green, combat veteran of the Korean and Vietnam Wars, were “front and center” at the Mann Gulch Memorial in 1999 and last year’s national reunion in Redding.

The NSA is proud too, of one of our own, Walter Morris: citizen, soldier, smokejumper. 🇺🇸

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Pfc. Allen Owen with fellow Marines. (courtesy Garry Peters)

## The Tiniest Marine, The Smallest Smokejumper, *But The Biggest Legend in the Valley of Our Folklore*

by Troop Emonds (Cave Junction '66)

**A**llen D. Owen stood four feet, 10-and-a-half inches tall. He was a forestry graduate from the University of Missouri. When totally sweat-soaked and standing there with two pockets full of silver dollars, he weighed 110 pounds.

It was a time when the smart people were avoiding the draft in favor of staying home and getting laid, rather than listening to some seventh grade-level sergeant screaming at you to make your bed.

The nation was at war. Young Americans were coming home in body bags. This little pint-sized humanoid wanted to cast his fate with the kids carrying the load over in the mud-filled foxholes, rather than dealing with the more difficult pursuits of the opposite sex. He said there was always something that set with him "the wrong way," listening to "expert college kids" who knew so much about the rights and wrongs of the world, yet never dared to venture out in it.

There was one service—that had the surest route to trouble. Rumor had it that they built men! They claimed

it was the last stronghold of honor, pride and discipline. For sure, their traditions demanded—always!—to be sent to the worst-possible places, to do the most-difficult of chores in fighting. So in short, Mouse lined up with those who wanted to go fight for their country!

This quick-witted little bundle of protoplasm swallowed all the claims—or should we say, the eagle, globe, anchor hook, line and sinker. However, when he walked into the nearest Marine Corps recruiting office, they thanked him for his interest, but with a laugh said that he was below the minimum standards for absorbing bullets. Not enough mass.

Undeterred, he went home and began the first of many official procedures to elbow his way into hell. His argument was simple. With so many Americans going to Canada and declaring themselves homosexuals to avoid military service, he brought up the value of investing in someone who wanted to "fight for his country!"

With a waiver from both the Senate and the House he secured the right paperwork that made it possible "to

get in.” He was now well on his way to absorb a high degree of flying metal before it hit the bigger guys. At least, that was his rationale for stepping out into the storm. He was entirely guilty of “Asking not what your country could do for you, but rather what you can do for your country.”

To make a long story short, he went “over there,” and stayed three years in Vietnam. Always in the most-dangerous places, always in the most-absurd situations, always bringing his humanity to the battlefield, and humor to those around him.

At first he coordinated supporting arms in a little bird-dog plane over the frays. But his real contributions came as a Recon Marine, whispering situation reports to our guys in the rear, as he sat there dressed in leaves, a few feet inside enemy base camps along the Ho Chi Minh Trail throughout the Annam Mountains of Indochina.

As he left the green machine behind, he wanted to become a smokejumper. He got the same song and dance from the jumpers as the Marine recruiter. Once again knowing the pen was mightier than the sword, he began his deranged vet routine of “Look, okay—I’m under the magic 54-inch, 120-pound minimum, but I carried a 70-pound pack up and down mountains in 120-degree jungles fighting for freedom.

“All I want is a chance to do the job. If I can’t cut it, I’ll be the first goddamned son-of-a-bitch to tell myself to head on down the road with no bad feelings.”

Well now! What was the one base in the jumper world that opened their hands to odd characters, outlaws and high-spirited types of great contrariness? Cave Junction-the Gobi!

What a gold mine he turned out to be!

I was a jumper for two seasons at C.J. before I went on a vacation with the Marines to visit exotic places, meet really nice people, and then kill them. Actually, it was through a deal I made with the Marine Corps, that I beat the draft, and was able to enjoy the summer of 1967 smokejumping without getting drafted.

In the summer of 1970 I had just returned from my three years in Vietnam and called the base to bother them. I was at the Medford, Ore., airport with the wife of a friend of mine, and I was trying to impress her. Nobody was impressed with the Marine thing, so I tried to gain some sort of redeeming status by showing her where I used to work. I wanted one of the jumpers to drive 60 miles, pick me up and drive us over to the base.

Since Mouse was a Marine, and a jumper, I guess they all figured he deserved to put up with me. So the jumpers said they were sending a rookie over to deal with me. Mouse showed up with a pilot and all of us drove

back to C.J. in this blue Corvette. Mouse said he bought his ’vette for \$4,000, the result of three years of savings from Vietnam.

All the way back to C.J. he was talking above the roar of rushing air and engine noise; loud and clear. All three of the other passengers, jammed into the other one seat, were wondering if he could actually see the road from way down below the dashboard. Of course, the thing that caused our knuckles to turn white was, as he talked, he had to look at us while describing what he was talking about. His hands described and demonstrated, as he showed us all the superb passing-power of the Corvette. It was especially keen during all those curves between Grants Pass and C.J., and I kept wondering when this guy was going to come up for air.

That was our first meeting, and even though I begged someone else to give me a ride back to the airport after a few days, it was the beginning of one hell of a ride through life after the war.

Eleven years later he sold his ’vette for more money than he paid for it new, but always described 1979 as the year of great loss. That was because he lost his ’vette, crashed the Gobi Flying Club’s airplane, and lost his ass (through a hemorrhoid operation), all in one month’s time.

Actually, at this stage of life I felt sorry for all those people who never met Al Owen, Mouse or Uncle Al, as all the kids used to call him. Hopefully, for those who

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did not know him, you'll get a hint of what he was.

I used to tell people that I laughed more during the Vietnam War than at any other time in my life. We were blessed with such characters, so that even during some of those times when two-thirds of my platoon were down on the deck wounded, there was hard-core humor. Some of them were really seriously wounded, yet the hard-noses made wise cracks, and caused laughter while the bad guys were shooting and throwing grenades at us.

Looking back, I really do have to say that Mouse made us all laugh harder. He was the only human alive who could quite utterly cause us to rock down, scratching for air, while we peed our pants.

He would bounce into a room and take it over. No matter where we were, he'd go on stage. He was always our emcee anytime we gathered. Those who didn't know him, would see what he was—as clearly as we all could. The great shame of it all was that none of this brilliant, spontaneous, humor was on film, where the entire world could have enjoyed it. He would get on these streaks and the overall vibes would encourage and feed him. It would cause us all to think: where on earth does he get this stuff?

We knew we were very lucky to have him. What is it that measures how well you are enjoying life? Well, it has to be how often and how hard you laugh. Mouse, wherever he went, made people have fun and laugh.

His value as a smokejumper was certainly below average. He did not produce incredible line and he certainly was handicapped as a packer. We would forever be waiting for him during pack outs. We'd come to a three-foot-tall fallen log and we'd easily vault over it, but Mouse couldn't. He'd have to walk all the way around and whenever he did catch up with us, he'd properly maul us with wise cracks that would make us all weaker with laughter. He'd sap our strength and then make fun of us.

To give a clue as to what he was like, we were on a late-fall fire when the rains came and soaked everything. When it came time to pack-up, there was a mad scramble for gear, chain saws, wet cargo chutes, climbing spurs and all the extras besides our personal gear. He always grabbed more gear than anybody else. It was like a squirrel grabbing for nuts.

I'd know he ended up getting more weight than me and we had this argument about him carrying more. After a couple miles, we took a break. When the break was over, we were trying to help each other up in order to begin our agony again.

He looked up at me and said, "Er, Troop, maybe you're right. I think this is your Pulaski, and the chain saw—maybe I was a bit hasty in grabbing it." When I reneged, and started arguing again, after I'd helped him to his feet, he took off on me leaving me to somehow

get up on my own.

To give you an idea of the weight he carried, I weighed his pack when we got back to the warehouse. His pack was wet and weighed in at 167 pounds. He had carried that thing on two-foot-long legs for four miles in a rainstorm. Two rugged miles were off trail.

Whatever he lacked in long strides, he more than made up for in his ability to convey knowledge and instruct. He was the best instructor any of us had ever met. His presentations were always so graphic and alive. He would never let any student wander one step away from the topic. All of his presentations were totally assimilated by his students. He was a master teacher. Mouse became a squad leader and his leadership was subtle, but blatant in effectiveness. Everyone who worked with him was inspired and ended up producing exceptional results.

At C.J. our circle of friends was each other and any time off was usually spent doing some activity where we all ended up being together. It was life and work mixed and life was one continual hangout.

## THE SHEPHERD

There was a rescue jump when a band of Boy Scouts had gotten lost. Mouse jumped in. It was an opportunity to excel and make everyone have a great time. Before the plane could leave he had an emergency request for food.

"Okay. These kids are starving; are you ready to copy?"

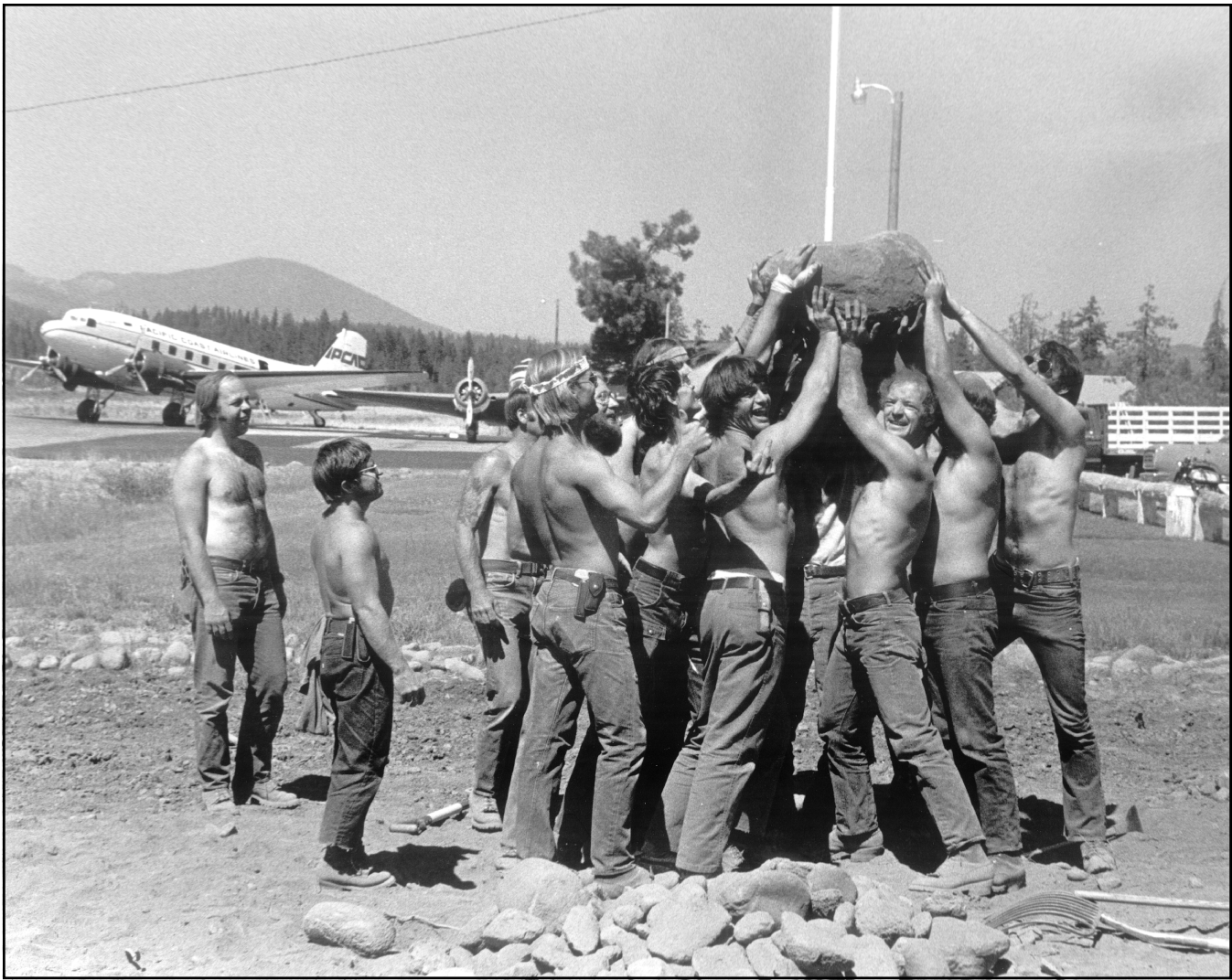
"We need hot dogs, mustard, buns, cold pop, and ice cream packed in dry ice, and marshmallows. Do you have a copy on that? Over."

"Okay. Call this number and tell the parents everything is OK and we'll have them all back home tomorrow. We need that food drop ASAP. Mouse. Over and out!" One thing for sure: that experience was the memory of a lifetime for each and every scout. That led to an annual spring tradition of Mouse and the boys jumping in with ice cream as cargo at a local Bible camp.

Always there were great, great parties. The Fourth of July was family day on the Gobi. All the kids came and Uncle Al (Mouse), dressed up in a Superman suit with a cape, sport-jumped in with goodies. There were bag races, tugs-of-war, piggyback races, and the funniest of all, the bat races.

For those who never saw a bat race, a line of kids and Mouse competed against the jumpers and the pilots. They would run 100 feet, pick up a baseball bat, put their foreheads against the bat and spin around three times, and then try to run back to the line of teammates. Well, there is no way anyone can make it straight back to the line. People would run off sideways, bang into each





*Smokejumper "Mouse" Owen watches C. J. crew hoist a large "Gobi Stone." (courtesy of Douglas Beck)*

other and fall down. Watching the pilots flopping down on the ground was hilarious.

The other great party, Family Day, was our annual water jump. Near C.J. there was a place called "the cuts." A hundred years or so ago, there was a lot of gold mining and lakes were produced from all the mining holes. Each spring in refresher training we had all jumpers land in a lake to gain confidence. The families would come and we'd have lots of rafts and campfires. All the kids would participate in the roundup of the wet jumpers bobbing around in the lake. Hot food, music, beer and fun were waiting on the shores.

The Gobi (C.J.) was a work adventure. We had an archery trail and target course, a trap club, a flying club and rifle- and handgun-shooting ranges. There was even a golf course for the pilots and corporate-type smokejumpers. Our land and way of life was the talk and the target of all who hated us. No one in the Forest Service could understand how we enjoyed our job and our pals as much as we did. It was almost as if they looked at us

and thought, "That's wrong—work should not be fun. There is something wrong with these idiots who are always enjoying themselves while at work."

### **ROAD KILL AND THE WAY OF JUMPERS**

Road kill always was an important resource in helping jumpers make it through the winter. Once we were returning from a fire on the coast. We were divided up into three rigs. The roads were winding and there were lots of steep drop-offs, and it was nighttime. We lost the lights of the other two rigs behind us, so we turned around and drove back, hoping nobody had gone over the side. There was an accident, all right. As our lights hit the guys in the road, we could see a bear laying in the road with Mouse atop it. He was either trying to give it artificial respiration or doing a Davy Crockett-type thing with a Swiss Army knife.

We learned that after we passed, a bear ran out of the brush and the next rig hit it. It was dead as a doornail. We loaded it up in the back of the rig with a plan



"Mouse" in his skydiving gear after jumping in on the 4th of July "Family Day on the Gobi." (courtesy of Troop Emonds)

to make great bear sausage. No sense in wasting good, fresh road kill. (Jumpers have been known to bring home stiff and long-dead road kill and be damned glad to find it.)

Back at the C.J. warehouse there were pictures taken with the bear. Somewhere there is a shot of Mouse tucked under the arm of Smokey. Mouse, as always, had a great flair for photo opportunities.

### COUNTRY ROADS

The early 1970s saw the C.J. jumpers back in the eastern Appalachian Mountains. (See Oct. 2000 issue of *Smokejumper* magazine, "Region 8 Smokejumping—The Untold Story.") It was a time of the movie *Deliverance* and John Denver's song *Country Roads*. The winds were strong and the hardwood forests with lots of hazards: electrical lines, barbed-wire fences, cliffs and rivers. The setting was beautiful—starkly different than in the West. The fuel was more flashy and dangerous, the ground steep, and the people—well, they were a constant contradiction.

The Ozarks and the Appalachians were folklore hot spots. There were extremes in hospitality. Some of those hollows we jumped into were right out of the *Deliverance* movie set. The other side of the coin was equally

extreme. When we would go into a town like Wise, Va. to go shopping, store employees and owners, whom we had never met, knew each and every one of us by name.

On occasion, we would each get three fire jumps a day. The fire season was February, March and April. Sometimes the mornings would hold a heavy snowstorm, but by afternoon the dry winds and direct sunlight would beat down on the barren deciduous forests. We'd be jumping by early afternoon. When we got back to our motel rooms there would be moon shine, soda pop, and homemade pies and cakes left at our doorsteps. They said that we "were the next thing down from astronauts!"

We were adopted by one farm couple and made practice jumps in their field. They roasted pigs and extended the greatest Appalachian hospitality to us. I'm sure they never had ever laughed as hard as with Mouse and the bandit smokejumpers from Oregon. In fact, we all chipped in later and brought this family out to Cave Junction to be our guests in return for the hospitality they sent our way.

There were other groups, talented bluegrass bands, who latched onto Mouse and the rest of us. We were invited to special, down-home bluegrass parties in the homes of people who were truck drivers, doctors and store clerks.

In contrast to that, there were fire jumps into remote hollows where we packed out and passed stills, marijuana, and illegal tobacco plots. The owners would just look at us and not return any greetings. Mouse had us rolling with unique remarks designed to get them to crack a laugh, but that only resulted in us bursting out as we trudged along. They had no idea of what to make of us, other than we came out of the sky, put a wildfire out and were certainly crazy. What new kind of revenue is this, laughing all the time? What do they have up their sleeves?

The pastime for residents of Wise, Va., was to go out to the small airport and watch airplanes take off and land. A special recreation developed when we started practice jumping. Of course, most of those folks had never been up in an airplane, so it didn't take long before we were asking the folks if they wanted to come on up for an airplane ride and watch us jump from up there. It was amusing to us that the people were so scared on their first airplane ride. They were always so frightened for us that we *had* to jump out of the plane. We jumped a DC-3 with Whity Hawkmeister and Jim Larkin as our pilots, but the really incredible fast plane that housed most of our guests was a sleek and fast Beech 99. Mouse would do the best he could to comfort all the tag-along observers. As everyone else had to crawl and claw their way about inside the aircraft, Mouse could stand up and run

back and forth with ease.

They would ask: "Troop, how about you? Are you scared?" And I would say: "I'm always petrified; afraid I'll hurt myself!"

"Why do you keep doing this?"

"I'm just trying to follow that little turd there out the door." One thing seems pretty sure, though ... nobody will be chucking hand grenades at us, so in that way this is a step up from my prior life!

Mouse always used to say, "Well, I hope they got their money's worth. They ought to get something for all the taxes they pay for the fun job of digging coal out of the ground. Besides, maybe one of them baked the pie they left beside my door the other night!"

### CHAMPION OF JUSTICE, AND OUR GREATEST SPOKESMAN

When Mouse heard of a young woman who wanted to be a smokejumper, but got sent down the road for no reason other than being a woman, he wasted no time getting ahold of her. He told her how to fight 'em and win. Deanne Shulman went on to become the first woman smokejumper, and all because of a guy who did not like unfair people or systems.

Mouse was wise beyond his years and compact size. When I returned from the war, I thought it was hilarious what so many people who knew nothing about the military would say. They would come up with the most absurd assumptions and views. Their charges had absolutely nothing to do with anything related to my experience. After a while it started getting on my nerves. They surely never asked our opinions, but boy, they certainly felt compelled to back us up against the wall and essentially question why we committed (in their minds) criminal acts.

Mouse's manner and style were a great comfort and inspiration to me. Somehow he had the intellect, the smoothness and the maturity to see my increasing inability to deal with some of the ignorance that seemed to rain down on me. Since I was still in the reserves, I kept my hair cut high and tight in total contrast to the sideburns and long hair that were typical throughout the '70s. Mouse had this way of telling profoundly funny stories about his experience in the Marine Corps. They always had a punch line that explained things about Marine traditions and the times. No matter how unfair and ignorant the audience was, he could turn their lights on. The final feeling he imparted to his audience was that he was terribly proud to have been a Marine, and to have served his country.

One time, after some rather-unfair assessments by some young diehard, anti-military members of the crew,

Mouse came up to me with great kindness and quietness. He was chewing his fingernails, and simply said, "Troop, there are those of us who have been there, and those who haven't." Mouse's ability to see into things and render comfort was more profound than any other human being I've ever met.

### THE MOUSE WHO ROARED

As I write this, it is the 25th anniversary of the exact moment that this story happened. It was raining. We were in a Bible Belt town called Andrews-Murphy, N.C. Everyone walked down the street each Sunday carrying a black book. Anyway, somebody turned on the TV, and the fall of Saigon was being telecast. We all gathered in one room before we were due to go out to the airport. One of the younger kids who didn't understand much about the food chain, or what humans do to each other across much of the world, made a wise crack. It was meant to be funny, ridiculing both the fleeing Vietnamese refugees, but more particularly, the Americans being routed.

They did not realize there were two old Marines who silently sat there with tears just pouring down their faces. Finally, Mouse got up in the display of anger that none of us had ever seen from him. He shouted, "Sure! Just jump down there and try to explain to those people running for their lives that, hey, there's nothing to worry about. The communists are all good guys and all will be good!"

Everyone looked and saw pain and venom spewing from this red-faced little man, who had always been the source of only good spirit and optimism. The entire crew took one look at Mouse and me and just quietly left. Someone threw me a set of keys and said: "If you guys feel like coming out later, here's a rig." Mouse and I watched the unfolding events for an hour or so, pointing out different places where we once stood. There were no stories. We just sat there thinking our own thoughts about all our friends who we stacked on helicopters like cordwood.

The disappointment for both of us was so gut wrenching and so profound. We eventually got up and headed off to the job. In fairness and in appreciation, all our non-military jumpers allowed us a wide berth. They knew Mouse and I were not to be kidded about matters of our service to our country.

### MOVING ON

One day at C.J. I got a phone call. "Troop, this is Al Dunton with the Alaska Smokejumpers. You don't know me, but I heard what they're doing to you and Mouse down there, and I think it's ridiculous."

"Sorry, sir, but what do you mean, 'What they're doing to me and Mouse?'"

"Well, you know, you guys are blackballed in the Forest Service, and I just want to let you both know that you have a place up here with the BLM Smokejumper Program."

I immediately went in to our boss, Gary Mills, and said, "I just got a call from Al Dunton up in Alaska. What do you know about me and Mouse being blackballed in the Forest Service?"

"Yeah, Troop. I've been trying to figure out a way to tell you and Mouse about this thing."

"Well, go ahead. What did we do wrong?" I asked.

"You didn't do anything wrong. Some of the big dogs think you and Mouse are behind the save-the-base movement. The word I got was they don't want Mouse at Redmond, because he's too small."

"Millsey, he's gone through that fight too many times, and he's one of the best squad-leaders and instructor we've ever known."

"I know, Troop, but they don't want him there."

"What about me? I'm 180 pounds. Am I too big?"

"The truth is, you're both perceived as management

headaches."

"Oh, really? Well, it's a damned good thing I'm getting out of jumping, and taking that lateral job on the Galice Ranger District."

"Ah, Troop. Al said you were blackballed in the Forest Service, not just jumping in the Forest Service."

## ALASKA SMOKEJUMPERS

I enjoyed 11 great fire jumps in Alaska with Mouse that summer. By and by a fire order came to have us fly south and jump the lower 48. Mouse and I jumped about four or five fires down in Yellowstone. He got sick on one fire and then missed another fire jump with me. The next fire jump he was in the same plane, but I was at the top of the list and he was at the bottom. My jump partner said to me, "Hey, Troop, you want me to let Mouse have my spot and you can both jump the fire? It doesn't look right, you getting separated on the jump list!"

I looked back at Mouse and he was giving me the Gobi (single finger salute), and I said: "Thanks, J.J., but Mouse deserves to get away from me on the jump list." So John Jones and I jumped out over the Teton Wilderness Area, and that was the last time I ever saw Mouse alive.



## THE LAST TIME I SAW MOUSE

J.J. and I had a great fire and a saddle horse-ride out where we saw about 400 elk. By the time we got back to Missoula, we found out Mouse had been sent back to Alaska. I had my choice of going back to Alaska, or terminating and getting a free plane ride back to C.J.

I went back to C.J.

I had to go pick up my truck in Portland and I stopped off to see this woman with whom I'd been in love for years. While there I was sitting at her table, I suddenly had this warm glow come over me. I looked at my watch and there on the face of my watch I saw a miniature face of Mouse laughing. Just as suddenly, I dropped my love interest and started laughing as I started remembering one hilarious experience after another with my friend Mouse. The woman thought my conduct had taken a strange turn and asked me about it and I simply started telling her about Mouse. On the drive back to C.J. there was no hint of anything being wrong ... only more and continuous thoughts about Mouse. This was odd, because I was obsessed with fantasies about this woman.

The next day at the Labor Day parade in C.J., Gary Mills came across the street and grabbed my hand, looked me squarely in the eyes and said, "Troop, Mouse is dead." He had been killed in a skydiving accident in Alaska.

Several weeks later the death certificate came from Alaska along with his ashes. There was a smokejumper airplane that launched from C.J. on an unauthorized flight. His ashes were spread over the Green Wall in the Kalmiopsis Wilderness Area. The Green Wall is a famous white-water area on the Illinois River said to be the wildest river in the Lower 48.

I thought back to a year prior to the death of Mouse. He and I were running that part of the Illinois and had a two-man raft that had to be constantly bailed out and we lagged behind the rest of the party. Mouse had gotten tired of talking and fell asleep in the raft. I pulled over to watch the rest of the crew as they approached the Green Wall. I took one look and thought the longer you look at it, the worse it's going to get. I went back to the boat and pushed off.

Mouse just woke up and asked, "What's going on, Troop?"

"Well, we got a serious bit of white water up ahead."

"Oh, got her all checked out, heh, Troop?"

"Yep, all checked out, Mouse."

It was then he heard the roar, stood up with bent knees to get a better look, and we were already in the sweeping current. There wasn't a chance of paddling back. "Troooooop!"

So, at that point we had no choice but hope for the best. As the entire rest of the base said: "Holy shit! Mouse and Troop are runnin' it!" We paddled and spun in the fury of it all. Some of the guys decided to be equally stupid and ran it, while the smart ones walked around the Green Wall.

## SEE MY SKIS?

Mouse's death was the only one that ever really broke me down. I was literally sick for at least two weeks. Eventually I asked to see the death certificate. The time of death was an hour earlier than the time that I had seen Mouse on the face of my watch in Portland. It made no sense at all, until I realized that Alaska is farther west than Oregon and there is exactly an hour difference in time. So, the time of death and the time of seeing Mouse, were the same.

I don't believe in much except the food chain. Some of my friends have told me it was just Mouse checking in with me, to say good-bye.

I don't dream much any more. In my youth I faintly remember either women chasing me or me chasing them. Since all the hormones have faded with age, there have been no more dreams about that sort of thing. The other thing I used to dream about was snakes. Maybe it was my close calls with them in Australia and Vietnam, but as of late they don't seem to slither my way anymore.

Only once, Mouse showed up in a dream. It was about five years ago, but clear and real. I said, "Mouse, what are you doing here? You're dead."

"Yeah, I know."

"Well, what's it like being dead?"

"Well, It's not everything it's cracked up to be, I'll tell you that." What is this, a dream or what?

"Hey, Troop. I got a question."

"What's that, Mouse?"

"You haven't seen my skis around, have you?" 🐻

*Troop Emonds graduated from Nichols College in Dudley, Maine, with a bachelors in forestry. After starting his smoke-jumping career, he served three years in Vietnam as a rifle platoon commander and a Special Reaction Force leader for a unit to "bail out friendlies who were in dire trouble." He finished his stint in the marines as Commanding Officer of the MP Company at Camp Pendleton. Returning to smoke-jumping, Troop jumped for 23 years totaling 525 jumps of which 261 were on fires.*

*He is currently living in Nehalem, Oregon, with his wife, Rivena, and son, Jed. He is currently developing the "ultimate" in fire tools—The Troop Tool—and can be contacted at [troop@dragonslayers.com](mailto:troop@dragonslayers.com)*

# NSA Has a New Secretary: Dave Bennett

After working on a ranger district for a summer, I was drawn like a moth to the flame by the jumpers but had no idea what it would be like to jump from an



*Dave Bennett (Missoula '61)*

airplane or if I could even do it. Milt Knuckles, (also Missoula '61), and I sort of talked each other into it. I remember filling out my application for the jumpers and decided to hand deliver it. You just can't trust the post office with important stuff.

It was November or December of '60, and when I walked into the Missoula base, there wasn't much going on. I wandered around the loft and the only person in sight was Earl Cooley sitting at his desk. I didn't have any idea who he was, and I was really nervous so I blurted out, "My name's Dave Bennett and I want to be a smokejumper!" "Well," says Earl, seeing that he had a real huckleberry on his hands, "sit down, 'Smokejumper' and let's see what we've got here." He made a big deal about opening up my application and looking it over. Albert Cramer wandered in, sensing entertainment. I'm eighteen years old and determined to act like the tough sumbitch that I'm positive they want me to be. This will get me the job for sure.

He asked a few lead-in questions and then got down to having some fun with me. Earl asks, "You look kind of skinny. Are you strong enough to work long hours on the fire line?" "Oh no sir, I'm not skinny, I'm *wirey*," I said. Poorly suppressed laughter erupts behind me from Albert. "I see you've got fire fighting experience, but have you been around airplanes much?" "Oh, yeah," I respond, having yet to take my first airplane ride or kick an airplane tire, "I've flown a lot." All of this expanding on the truth is making me even more up tight but now there's no turning back. Earl says, "That's good, but do you think you can jump out of an airplane?" This was the coup de grace. Now I'm sweating bullets. I shriek, "No problem. I'm really brave!" Earl chuckles and Albert runs out of the room laughing crazily. Earl says, "I can see that for sure. We'll let you know in a few weeks."

In spite of that sterling performance, I *did* get the acceptance letter and off to Ned training I went. For me, being in the jumpers was a first big step for a

dumb kid that had never been anywhere, to becoming a dumb kid who had seen a good part of the western U.S. from the door of an airplane. Well, that was a start, anyway. Most of my jumps were out of Missoula, but I toured most of the jump bases on backup crews. I was on the Alaska crew for a couple of years and went to Grangeville one summer. That was the year that the propeller broke off the Ford out over Elk City and we all came plummeting down on the locals. Frank Borgeson landed the Ford in a sawmill lumberyard with the right engine preceding him by a couple of minutes.

Being a jumper was my college "scholarship." What money I could save each fire season, with a few odd jobs thrown in, would see me through the school year. At the time I really didn't understand how remarkable that was. A major discovery, sometime later, was when my own kids started college. What, you need money for college? Lots of it.

After finally graduating from college and leaving the jumpers in 1966, I went off to be an engineer. One of my impressions during the first few weeks as an engineer was "these guys don't work as a team very well and they don't look out for each other very much." At least not like a jumper crew. I spent the first few years as a stress engineer. When robots first appeared on the commercial market in the 1970s, I became intrigued with them, and that's what I've done ever since.

I currently own part of a robotics company in Maryland. It's mostly a traveling job with an office in my home in Richland, Washington, but I go to the mother ship in Maryland once a month or so.

I didn't shake the jumping urge after leaving Missoula. I was a skydiver for another 20 years until the ground started getting too hard. Not to mention the mountains getting steeper and rivers getting deeper. Now I torment trout with my fly rod when I get the chance, although the fish haven't learned proper respect yet. There's an old tail-dragger Cessna in the hanger to take me to where the fish are. I had a flying business for a few years but now I fly to support my engineering business and for fun.

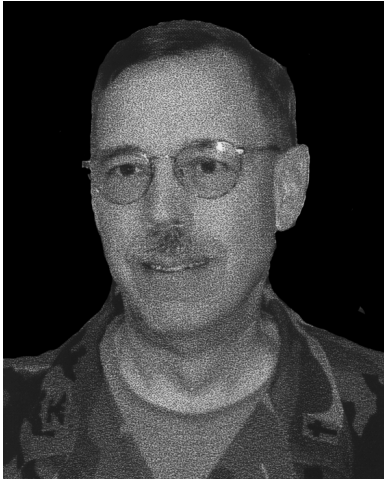
I have three children, two of which live nearby, and the third in Reno. My three grandchildren are immensely fun and keep me busy with soccer games and airplane rides. My girlfriend lives across the road, and I'm almost done with the tunnel under the street to her house and trying to hide the dirt somewhere.

Thirty-four years after my last Forest Service jump, I can still say that the Jumper Operation was the best job I ever had. The NSA brings that all back to life for me.

Give me a shout at [bigguy@owt.com](mailto:bigguy@owt.com). 🦋



# Checking The Canopy



by **Tom Decker**  
(Idaho City '64)  
COL. U.S. ARMY

## *MENDING THE DRIFT FENCE*

A yearly task to work this ridge  
high, above the Payette River bridge,  
a mile or so below maybe two,  
to check the fence wires, called

a drift fence, by some few who knew  
its purpose to hold cows on one side,  
sheep on the other, for mixing the  
two  
on one range ranchers could not  
abide.

So wire was strung, whether by  
necessity,  
tradition or both, nobody knew for  
sure,  
but fallen trees from the heavy snows  
ruins many a good fence as every  
cowboy knows,

We walked the fence two days of  
summer,  
pulling tangled, broken wire,  
patching it  
some, and we took it down again in  
the fall  
just before the snows hid all

traces of cow and sheep pasture.  
You see, to avert ill-fated cow versus  
sheep disaster,  
some clever ranger--or cowboy  
stranger--  
devised a way to keep his herd,

held back by only 1 wire,  
2 staples, and secured by a third  
to gate the fence wires to the post.  
Pretty neat and it worked; yeah,  
when

things went well, a man could  
finish the fence in a couple days,  
three at most.  
The wires ran through chaparral and  
yellow pine

snaking through tangles of buck  
brush;  
here and there a lone tree held the  
wire  
as tight as we could make it, a bee  
line  
up and down the ridge.

Oh, to fence the landscapes  
of our lives where we need the space  
on our range to keep folks from  
drifting where they don't belong

and getting in each other's face.  
A fence with no barbed wire, 'nary a  
post,  
held by a handshake, or two at the  
most,  
and then only when needed, it just  
might

keep edgy folks from getting up  
tight,  
when things are too close  
and some headstrong fool  
plunges headlong, losing his cool,

and winds up busted, hurt and  
maybe worse  
smearing God's name with an evil  
curse.  
So take a day or two, three at the  
most,  
to set a tight fence wire,

mile by tough mile, staple by staple,  
wire to post,  
and clear out the dead fall and the  
brush  
to keep folks from getting in a rush  
so they can come and go in peace

til things work out between  
the neighbor and thee  
til winter snows come again,  
and none know the difference then

between sheep range and cow  
or to what belongs to me  
and what matters to thou.

This grew out of another Forest  
Service experience. It was an annual  
event done by ground pounders out  
of the 3rd Fork Guard Station in  
District 6 of the Boise National  
Forest. It restored the drift fence  
between cow and sheep range so that  
the wire would separate the woolies  
from the white faces. Charlie  
Morrow, an old time Forest Service  
employee, led a couple of green-  
horns down the ridge to see if we  
could do it right. 🌲

*Tom Decker jumped Smokey's Rock Pile  
in Idaho City in '64 and '65. He is chief  
of the Department of Ministry and Pas-  
toral Care at Madigan Army Medical  
Center at Fort Lewis, WA. He can be  
reached at [deckertr@earthlink.net](mailto:deckertr@earthlink.net).*

# Intercontinental Bombing Targeted U.S., Led to Paratrooper Deployment as Smokejumpers

by Carl Gidlund

**M**ore than 1,000 Japanese bombs rained down on the American continent during World War II in the world's first intercontinental bombing campaign. They didn't cause much damage, but they did kill and led to the only deployment of U.S. Army paratroopers as smokejumpers.

The bombs were borne by 30-foot balloons, each crafted from 600 sheets of mulberry parchment paper and persimmon glue by Japanese schoolgirls. The girls weren't allowed to wear hairpins or have long fingernails for fear the paper would be punctured. They also wore socks and gloves as fur-

ther attempts to protect the paper during construction.

The hydrogen-filled craft were designed to drift in the jet stream some 70 hours while they floated the 6,000 miles from the home islands to North America at speeds of up to 200 mph. Their purpose was to ignite forest fires and thus create panic.

Each balloon, carrying five or six incendiaries and one conventional bomb, was laded with up to 30 six-pound sand-filled ballast bags. An aneroid barometer was attached to a platform beneath the balloon. When it rose above 30,000 feet, the barometer would trigger

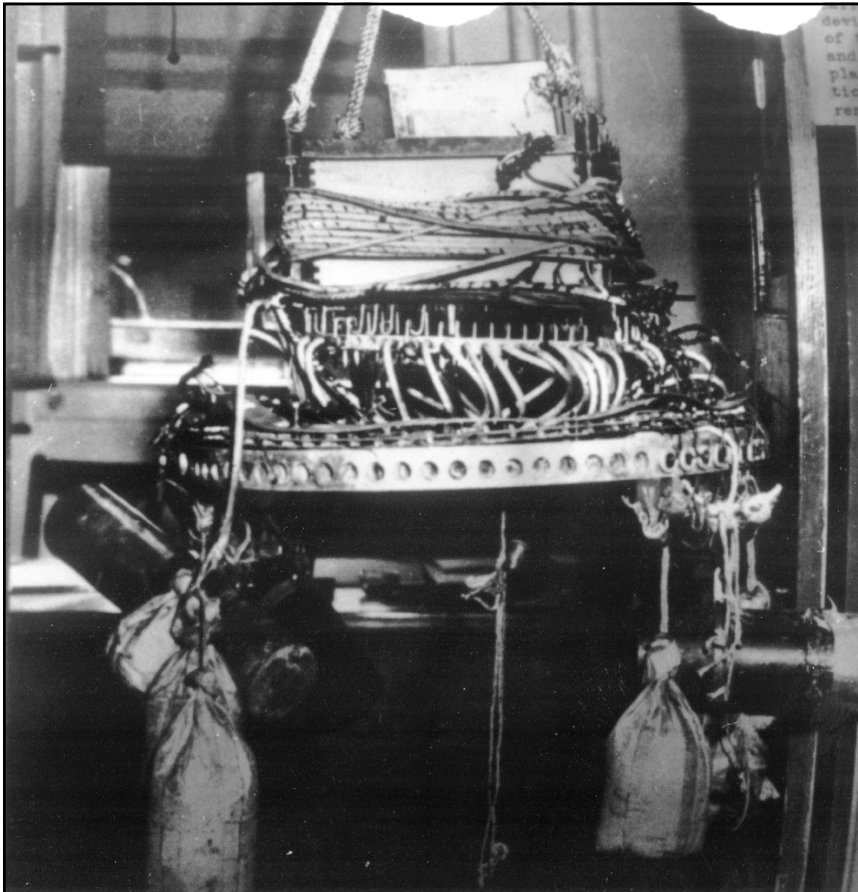
venting and the balloon sank. When it dipped below 30,000, another device dropped sandbags. The designers figured that, once the last sandbag was released, the balloon would be over North America. Then, an onboard battery lit a series of fuses to release the bombs, and finally a demolition charge to destroy the balloon and bomb platform.

An early version of the weapon was tried beginning in June 1944, but none of the 200 balloons launched made it across the Pacific. After a redesign, the campaign began in earnest that October. Eventually, 9,300 were launched.

The U.S., however, was not caught off guard. Our intelligence services had learned of the threat, placed the military on alert, and within two weeks, balloon fragments were found in Montana. Then, a balloon envelope was fished from the sea, other pieces were found, and scientists were able to construct a rudimentary picture of the weapon. After analyzing sand from the ballast bags, they concluded that it was scooped from the shores of Honshu Island.

Our government decided to keep a lid on the story. Authorities surmised that if they learned that the bombs were reaching our shores, the Japanese would be encouraged to send more. The news media cooperated, and the Japanese didn't learn until after the war that the balloons were landing here. Based on their assumption that the campaign was unsuccessful, the Japanese High Command shut it down in April 1945.

But our government didn't know if it would resume. As the



*A side view of the ballast-dropping device on a balloon bomb launched from Japan. (Army Signal Corps photo, courtesy Carl Gidlund)*

wet spring turned into a dry summer, the Forest Service asked the Army for help. It responded by dispatching the 555<sup>th</sup> Parachute Infantry Battalion. The top-secret deployment, during which the black paratroopers were trained and used as smokejumpers, was dubbed "Operation Firefly."

The balloon campaign ultimately failed because nearly all the weapons were sent during the winter and wet spring. But authorities feared that the Japanese might use the balloons to carry biological or chemical agents. They didn't, probably fearing retaliation with simi-

lar weapons.

The bombs were lethal, however. On May 5, 1945, the Rev. Archie Mitchell and his wife drove a group of children to a picnic at Gearhart Mountain near Bly, Ore. While he was parking the car, one of the children tried to move a metal object he'd found. It exploded, and Elsie Mitchell and five children, aged 11 to 13, were killed. They were the only enemy-inflicted casualties on the mainland U.S. during World War II.

Another balloon actually interfered with our atomic bomb project. It knocked out power to the

Hanford Engineering Works in eastern Washington when it snagged in transmission lines. That caused a short circuit to the cooling pumps of a nuclear reactor that was producing uranium slugs for the bomb later dropped on Nagasaki. Production was set back three days.

Defense authorities guess that about 1,000 balloons made it to North America, but only 285 have been found. Most ended up near the Pacific Coast, from Alaska to Mexico, but two drifted to Michigan. 📍

*Carl Gidlund can be reached at: [gidlund1@earthlink.net](mailto:gidlund1@earthlink.net)*

## Documentary Producer Named NSA Historian

by Carl Gidlund

Meet Stevan M. Smith, veteran of two Vietnam combat tours with the Marines, Emmy Award-winning documentary producer, the man who researched and put together the NSA's two-hour video on smokejumping, and the NSA's new historian.

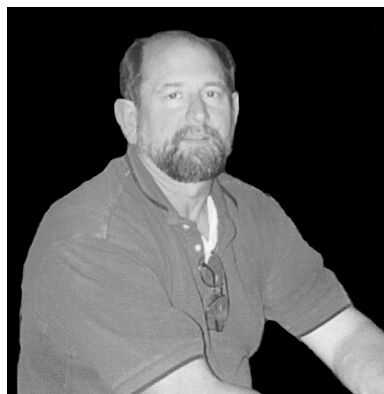
Although he isn't a smokejumper, he is, according to Association President **Larry Lufkin** (Cave Junction '63), "Probably the most knowledgeable person alive about our program. He worked full-time on our video for two years, dug through volumes of reminiscences and histories, conducted nearly a hundred interviews with jumpers and others associated with us, viewed thousands of slides and miles of film, and shot the action all over the West.

"In the process, he became a smoke-jumper advocate and, quite simply, the foremost expert on our history," Lufkin said.

Smith, 54, grew up in Springfield, Ore., and fought fires at age 16 as an engine crewman in Lane County, Ore. Following his high school graduation, he joined the Marines and, between 1965 and 1967, served two tours as a radio operator in the northernmost provinces of South Vietnam.

Following his discharge as a sergeant, he enrolled at Oregon State University from which he graduated with a degree in broadcast communications in 1970. He then studied in the Soviet Union for nearly a year as a Portland State University graduate student in Russian history, language and culture.

Smith began his video career in 1971



*Stevan M. Smith*

as a general assignment news cameraman with KGW-TV News in Portland. Four years later, he moved to Seattle's KING-TV as cameraman, assignment editor, show and special projects producer and, eventually, managing editor.

He struck out on his own in 1989, forming a production company devoted to corporate video projects, documentaries and freelance news stories. He garnered his Emmys for two PBS projects that looked at some of the combat related issues of Vietnam veterans.

Smith is concerned that smoke-jumper history might be lost.

"The valuable bits that we all collect over our lifetimes might be tossed out when aging jumpers pass away. I'd like to send out a special page in the magazine. Jumpers could pull the page and put it with their memorabilia," Smith says. "That

special page would provide instructions on how the estate executor can send pictures, news clips or other jumper memorabilia to the NSA historian to be on permanent loan, and added to the NSA record," he explains.

Based on his work on the NSA video project, Smith recognizes the dangers inherent in the fire fighting profession and wants the responsible agencies to improve fire fighter safety. "I have the nagging concern that we're not learning the lessons of history. Both Mann Gulch and South Canyon are still fresh with me because I spent so much research time with the survivors and family members of some who died. I'm very concerned that the Forest Service and BLM have not shown more interest in upgrading the personal fire shelter."

He explains that Jim Roth, brother to McCall jumper Roger Roth, one of three jumpers and 10 other fire fighters killed in the 1994 South Canyon Fire, has designed and built what Smith believes is a very effective shelter. He'd like to see it seriously considered by the federal agencies.

Smith notes that, while he may not be a smokejumper, he is a parachutist, and probably a lot more like us than many of us would admit: "My first jump was at 51 while working on the *History of Smoke-jumping* documentary. Without fear of contradiction, I can say it wasn't a pretty landing."

Smith, a life member of the association, replaces fellow life member **Ron Stoleson** (Missoula '56) as historian. Stoleson has been named NSA's second vice president. 📍

# BOOK REVIEW

## *Jumping Fire: A Smokejumper's Memoir of Fighting Wildfire*

By Murry A. Taylor  
New York: Harcourt—\$26  
Available through  
NSA Merchandise—\$25

Reviewed by Starr Jenkins,  
author of *Smokejumpers, '49:  
Brothers in the Sky*

In *Jumping Fire*, Murry Taylor, the oldest active smokejumper in America, puts you right there in the door of the plane for your first of dozens of parachute jumps into numerous forest fires. With him you leap into the sky, pull your rip cord, feel the glorious opening of the chute, fly your steerable ram-air parachute down among trees or snags to the precarious jump spot, sack up your gear, and do battle with fire after fire through the grueling Alaska and Idaho fire seasons of 1991.

*Jumping Fire* is the most-definitive book on smokejumping in the '90s, the action taking place mostly among the Bureau of Land Management jumpers in Alaska. As you join this group, you see that these BLM jumpers actually form the front-line summer fire brigade for that entire, huge, wilderness state.

Taylor, who is just 50 as he starts this 1991 season, also brings in many other hair-raising yarns from earlier days, in his 20 or so previous summers of jumping and firefighting since he rookied at Redding, Calif., in 1965. As he tells the story, you get to be friends with him and his articulate, humorous, hell-raising,

fire-obsessed buddies as they devote 100 percent of their lives, abilities and energy (3–6 months a year) to going after those roaring blazes and (usually) knocking them down for other less-elite fire troops to take over and mop up.

He gives you the strenuousness of the life, how *hard* they work, the many-faceted dangers,

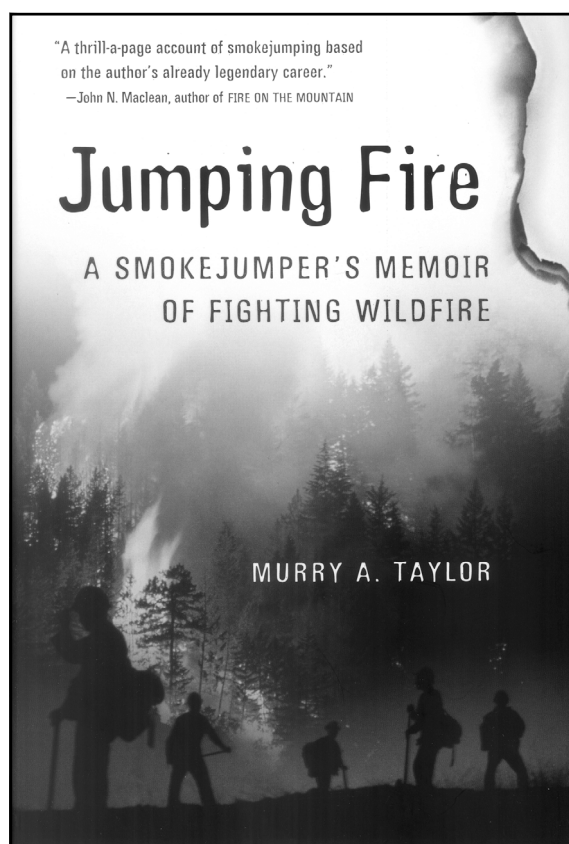
injuries or even death do occur.

You get the authentic feel of a modern smokejumper crew and its fire bosses, its relations with planes and their pilots, with spotters and base managers, with other jumpers from the Lower 48, and with the women they long to ravish but have left behind for the fire season. You also get true pictures of the tremendous love smokejumpers have for each other, for their bizarre profession and for the wild beautiful land they fly over and jump into day after day.

You find out how readily they work 24–36 hours at a stretch, going all out, all day and all night to stop that fire—then to feast on canned ham, beans and candy bars and flop exhausted to sleep on rocks or cargo chutes whenever a break in the wind or line-digging allows.

Yet, despite the prominence of both parachuting and firefighting in this story, there is another theme running throughout: How crushing this summer devotion to fire is to any man-woman relationship when the woman gets shut out of the man's life so constantly and repeatedly during the long fire season.

Thus Taylor shows from personal experience how the parachuting fire-addicts, though living their dream of action-adventure, are repeatedly crushing normalcy out of their lives by this addiction to adventure. And thus tragedies of broken marriages and other relationships saturate and keep immature the otherwise-glorious brothers in the sky. 🪂



the rigorous tests one must pass every season to re-qualify, the tremendous amount of safety procedures and equipment and protocols which have to be learned and mastered, to put men eager to tumble out of airplanes into the battle with a fair chance of stopping that fire and coming out both alive and uninjured. And he shows you how often major

# Touching All Bases

## A Report on the 2000 Fire Season

by Chuck Sheley

This year the National Smokejumper Program was made up of 393 smokejumpers, divided between the U.S. Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management. The Forest Service provided 284 jumpers, staffing seven bases and supported by eleven aircraft. The BLM had 104 jumpers and eight aircraft operating out of Boise and Fairbanks. The demand for jumpers was heavy and several requests went unfilled as the supply was depleted. During the 1999 season the action centered in Northern California where jumpers from most of the bases finished out the season. This season Montana and Idaho became the center of the fire scene.

The scope of the program is extensive with jumpers being moved to meet the demands of the fire season. The prediction by the ADFF study that money invested in the smokejumper program will result in a tremendous savings in fire management expenses is being borne out. Although there is little mention of project work in this summary, it is estimated that smokejumpers will spend over 10,600 person hours climbing trees in New York and other areas involved in the Asian longhorn beetle project.

### Alaska

After the fatality during refresher training in April, all jumping using the BLM ram-air system was suspended pending the outcome of the investigation. Rookie training was canceled. This suspension lasted until early July which coincided with the end of the Alaska season. USFS jumpers filled in during this time. By mid July all Alaska jumpers had completed refresher training and most moved to the lower 48 for the busy fire season.

There were 134 fire jumps made by USFS jumpers in Alaska this season. Three hundred fifteen fire jumps were made by the Alaska jumpers in the lower 48, which was well above the ten-year average of 200 jumps per season.

The Alaska jumpers currently have 18 open positions and anticipate adding 10 new positions giving a total of 28 vacant positions for the 2001 season.



### Boise

The 2000 fire season was the busiest on record for the BLM Boise Smokejumpers. New highs were set for numbers of fires staffed and numbers of jumpers put on fires. Jumper activity was almost equally divided among Colorado, Utah and Nevada. Jumpers staffed helicopters and engines early in the summer until the BLM smokejumper program came back on line.

There were 53 Boise jumpers this season with 933 fire jumps being made by Boise operations. Visiting jumpers made 646 jumps.

### Grangeville

Fire activity and subsequent initial attack activity from Grangeville slightly exceeded average annual response levels. However, fire staffing requirements ran significantly ahead of normal. Grangeville utilized a WCF Twin Otter and pilots from R-4 during the 2000 fire season. This was a marked departure from contract provided aircraft services previously relied upon. The aircraft was flown at 170 hours in support of fire and aviation activities.

Grangeville had 30 jumpers this season including five rookies. They made a total of 328 fire jumps including 276 from Grangeville. There were two significant lost time injuries this season. Brett Rogers and Willie Kelly were temporarily promoted to squad leader positions for the fire season while Brian Kopka filled the squad leader position for the Chicago work in the off-season.

### McCall

Seventy smokejumpers including nine rookies operated out of McCall last summer. The New Mexico crew went south on May 1st and jumpers were sent to Alaska on May 15th. Initial attack from the McCall base began on June 22nd and continued at a steady pace. High demand for resources kept the McCall jumpers filling overhead assignments on larger fires. During August, McCall established a spike base at Vernal, Utah, which saw steady action for five weeks. The last fire jumped was out of the Grand Junction base on October 9th.

Seventy-two fires using 468 jumpers were jumped out of McCall during the 2000 season. Action in all

regions and BLM country totaled 699 fire jumps.

### Missoula

The 2000 season was a big one for the 75 Missoula-based jumpers. Thirty-one rookies completed training with 25 of those assigned to the Missoula base while others went to Grangeville and West Yellowstone. There were 719 fire jumps made by Missoula jumpers during the season with 542 fire jumps being made from the base including visiting jumpers. The 542 jumps broke records dating back to the 1985 season when there were 650 fire jumps from the base. The injury report found three major and 11 minor injuries. The base reached "jumped out" status on 28 days this season. Willis Curdy was detailed to the Aviation Unit where he flew IR flights and as a co-pilot on jumper missions. Paul Chamberlin was selected for a one-year position as the Northern Rockies IA fire safety specialist.

### North Cascades

The 22 jumpers at North Cascades spent the majority of their fire time in R-6 where they completed 225 fire jumps out of their total 269 fire jumps for the season. They had only two jump injuries this season both classified as minor.

### Redding

Activity in Region Five was below normal this season resulting in 197 fire jumps being made outside California. By the end of the season, Redding jumpers had made 346 fire jumps. It is interesting to note that 53 fires were acted upon by jumpers as ground action personnel. The Redding base was staffed with 44 jumpers this season with nine rookies completing their training and being added to the ranks. Two of these rookies were career Forest Service employees detailed for the season. There were three injuries this season but all their jumpers returned to jump status during the season.

Some career changes have occurred with Al Foley accepting an AFEO position on the Lassen N.F.; Steve Murphy a FEO position of the Plumas N.F.; Rick Haagenson to Sherpa co-pilot in Redding; Stan Kubota to air tanker base manager at Chester. Loft Foreman, Bob Harris retired after a 25-year career with the smokejumpers.

### Redmond

It was a light fire season for Region Six with totals showing about 60 percent of average number of fire jumps. There were 206 fire jumps made on 42 fires within the region. Counting action out of the area, the Redmond jumpers made 316 fire jumps this season.



*Jack Mathews (Missoula '48) is pictured with Bee Moua and his son Tony at the Hmong New Year celebration in Santa Barbara, Calif., in 1999. Jack recently passed away (see story on page 48). He was active with the Hmong in Laos since 1958 spending many years with the C.I.A.*



There were 38 jumpers on staff this season with 13 rookies successfully completing training. NCSB rookies were included in this group. There were two serious injuries this season.

Personnel changes include Mike Brick leaving as Loft Foreman; Tony Navarro taking a teaching job in Montana (will likely jump out of Missoula after 18 years at Redmond); Cynthia Lusk moving to a new job in California and Earl Palmer pursuing a career in flying.

## West Yellowstone

The West jumpers totaled 228 fire jumps on 42 fires this season, which was their second highest number in a time period from 1991. Only the 307 jumps in 1994 were higher. Action on Region Four fires accounted for about half of their jumps with Region One in the next position. The period of July 21–31 was the busiest showing 78 fire jumps being made. Only three minor injuries were sustained this season. 🦋

## A Response to Chuck Mansfield's Article on the Los Alamos Fires

by Jon Klinge

(Cave Junction '65)

I had the good fortune of jumping with Chuck Mansfield at Cave Junction in 1965 and enjoyed reconnecting with him at the reunion this past summer. However, I do have concerns over some statements in his article in the October issue of *Smoke-jumper* magazine. The article had some interesting personal observations about the Cerro Grande Fire in the Jemez Mountains near Los Alamos, New Mexico, but contained some incorrect statements and conclusions.

Up until the Cerro Grande Fire burned over the area, I worked with the staff of the Forest Service, United States Geological Survey (USGS), Los Alamos County and the Los Alamos National Laboratory on a multi-year plan to get cool ground fire back into the area while minimizing adverse impacts on wildlife.

The article indicates fire is rare in the Jemez Mountains, which is not correct. The ponderosa pine zone burned hottest and with the most acreage in the fire. Fire return interval in ponderosa throughout the Southwest, including the Jemez, was about 2–15 years, prior to the 1870s (based on 300-year tree ring data from the Laboratory of Tree Ring Research, University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ 85721). Soil cores from a bog in the Jemez show fires occurring regularly in that drainage for the past several thousand years.

Fire almost ceased in Southwestern ponderosa pine in the 1870s, the result of heavy livestock grazing which consumed grasses to the point where the system couldn't sustain fire. This resulted in seedlings, which normally had been killed by low intensity understory grass fires surviving. The system changed from relatively open stands of large trees with grass understory to dense stands of small trees and a sterile needle ground cover. We exacerbated the situation with aggressive fire suppression (we did our job very well) and with logging which removed the large trees (not a fire problem) and left stands of dense small trees. Roads of course, make it easier to fight a fire but they also increase the probability of an ignition during extreme fire conditions by allowing lots of people to use the woods.

Most of the extreme fires in the Southwest have been man caused; extreme burning conditions are generally too dry for lightning. I agree with Chuck that the forests in the Southwest are in a very unnatural and unhealthy condition. They are primed for blow-up conditions and unnatural stand replacing fires. Under natural conditions, you couldn't have created a fire such as Cerro Grande if every jumper (and ex jumper) in the country was there with a drip torch.

The conclusions in the article were that we need more grazing, logging and roads. These are the activities that created the problem. A big part of the solution to fire and ecosystem problems is to get regular low intensity fire back into the system. This will be difficult and will require some very competent fire management people. Until this happens, it is reasonable to



*This old historic photo was forwarded by Pat Scheid and the source identified by Dennis Golik. It's from the June 1950 National Geographic magazine page 711. The article is titled "Montana, Shining Mountain Timberland."*

predict that when La Nina hits the Southwest, we will have large blow-up condition fires and will lose more homes, cabins, ranches and likely towns.

For those interested in more information and summaries of fire in Southwest ecosystems see: Mac, Opler, Haecker and Doran. 1998. *Status and Trends of the Nation's Biological Resources*. USGS. Vol. 2, pages 543–592; and Allen, Falk, Hoffman, Klingel, Morgan, Savage, Schulke, Stacey, Suckling and Swetnam. 2001. *Ecological Restoration of Southwestern Ponderosa Pine Ecosystems, A Broad Framework*. In Press. 🦋

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# NSA Member Seeks Help, Information on Brother Missing in Laos

by Carl Gidlund

**G**ene DeBruin (Missoula '59) may still be alive in Laos nearly 37 years after his shoot down, according to his brother. And, **Dr. Jerry DeBruin**, a NSA associate member, asks smokejumpers to help.

Jerry, a professor at the University of Toledo, says he is frustrated because the U.S. government continues to upgrade relations with Laos without first obtaining the release or verifiable accounting of the fate of his brother and others missing in action since the war in Southeast Asia..

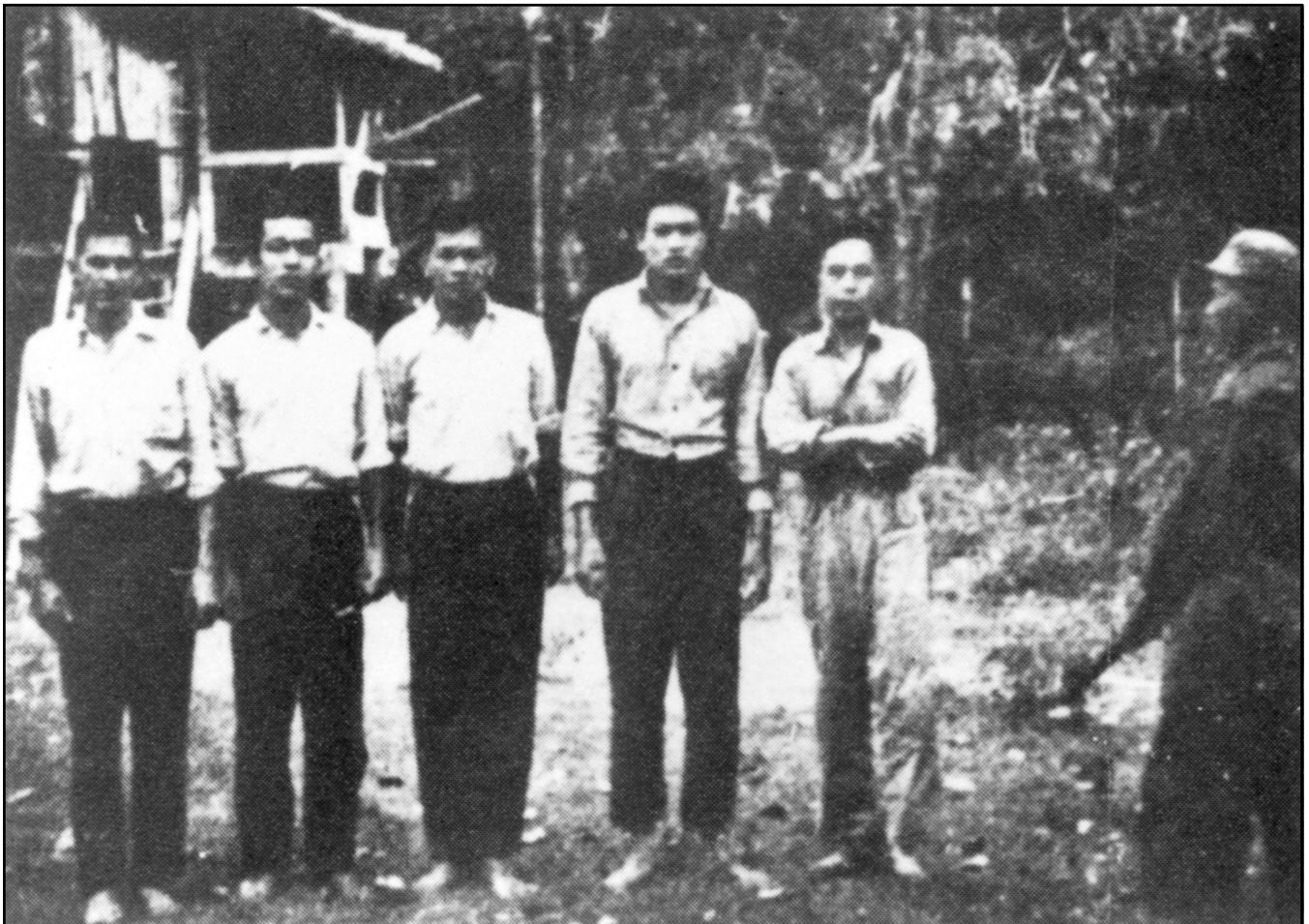
As recounted in the Oct. 1995, and Jan. 1996, issues of the NSA newsletter, the former Missoula and Alaska jumper was a cargo kicker on an Air America C-46 that was downed Sept. 5, 1963. Pathet Lao anti-aircraft fire flamed it during a supply drop to a Royal Lao Army battalion eight kilometers from the Viet-

namese border.

Gene and four fellow crewmembers parachuted from the plane, but were captured and later photographed in prison by the Pathet Lao. For nearly three years, the prisoners were held in several camps, their numbers augmented by two, a U.S. Air Force helicopter pilot and a Navy fighter pilot who also were shot down and captured.

On June 29, 1966, the group secured weapons and shot their way out of their jungle prison. They split up, Gene electing to pair up with a sick crewmate, a Hong Kong Chinese who had been the C-46's radio operator.

The helicopter pilot was hacked to death by villagers; the fighter pilot, Dieter Dengler, was rescued 23 days after the escape; one Thai crewman was



*Gene DeBruin (far left) taken in Tha Pa Chon Village Prison May 1964. (courtesy of Jerry DeBruin)*



*Gene DeBruin (Missoula '59). (courtesy of Jerry DeBruin)*

recaptured, then released in January 1968; but the fate of Gene DeBruin, his companion and two other Thais is unknown.

DeBruin said he has gathered 11 confirmed sightings of his brother in various Pathet Lao prisons.

"To me, Gene is a known Pathet Lao prisoner, but to the Pathet Lao he represents a stumbling block that stands in the way of getting what they want from the United States," he said.

"For years, the Lao have tried to sweep Gene's case under the rug by providing us with at least six different versions of how Gene supposedly died. Not a single version has been verified."

"In the process of normalization of relations, the U.S. government should have held the Lao accountable for the immediate release of Gene. Unfortunately, this failed to happen. Meanwhile, reports – some generated as shams, others needing verification – of Gene living in Southeast Asia continue to surface. According to officials of the U.S. government, however, the veracity of these reports remains unknown because they need 'further analysis' which eventually leads to debunking."

DeBruin has traveled to Laos where he failed to obtain information from Pathet Lao and Vietnamese officials. He said he also visits the Laotian embassy in Washington, D.C., each year, to no avail.

He hopes that Americans who want to do business with Laotians and Vietnamese would stipulate in their contracts that they want POWs released and verifiable accountings made of MIAs.

He also requests that smokejumpers ask friends who have served in Southeast Asia for information on

Gene and other missing persons, or for leads where more information may be obtained. DeBruin also asks for the names of smokejumpers who served but did not return from Southeast Asia. He said he wants the information to establish contact with those who have had experiences similar to his.

"Over the years, our family has learned 'the squeaky wheel gets the grease,'" DeBruin said. "And that's especially true in the offices of the U.S. Congress. Your political representatives employ people who tally the number of phone calls, letters, faxes and e-mails on specific issues."

"Please call, write a note or send a fax or e-mail to your elected officials, urging them to inquire with various agencies such as the Department of State, the Defense Department's POW/MIA branch, Central Intelligence Agency, U.S. Agency for International Development, National Security Agency, et al. on behalf of Gene. Numbers send clear messages." 📧

*Dr. Jerry Debruin may be contacted at P.O. Box 352781, Toledo, OH 43635-2781. His phone number is (419) 885-0927, fax is (419) 882-3370, and e-mail is [debrui@uoft02.utoledo.edu](mailto:debrui@uoft02.utoledo.edu)*

## Information Regarding 60-Year Reunion video

For anyone who attended or missed the video presentation shown during the 60-year reunion the night of July 17 in Redding, you can now purchase a copy of the video. The cost is \$15 and includes shipping. If you would like a copy, you can contact Derrek Hartman at the West Yellowstone smoke-jumper base during the fire season, or at home during the winter.

E-mail address:

[hartmanfilms@earthlink.net](mailto:hartmanfilms@earthlink.net), or you can write or call Derrek Hartman, P.O. Box 464, Seal Beach, CA 90740. Telephone: (562) 594-9553. Please make checks payable to the West Yellowstone Smokejumper Welfare Fund. The video has no broadcast capabilities and is meant only for the bros and their families and friends.



# Items From the Fire Pack



## What Looked Like a Large Doll Was a Body

A fire call came from the Trinity Forest in California for three men. The lookout had reported “a lot of heavy black smoke.”

Three of us suited up and away we went. When we arrived in the area, we could not find the smoke. After about 15 minutes of searching, we saw a very faint wisp of smoke. The jump was made on the opposite ridge about a half-mile away.

After we gathered at a creek below the smoke, I had the other two jumpers wait while I made my way up the slope in an attempt to find the fire. I had gone about a 100 yards and was pulling myself up on a large rock. When my head came to the top of the rock I was about three feet from what at first glance looked like a large doll. It turned out to be a body!

The “black smoke” had come from the crash of a Cessna 170 carrying a doctor and an army captain from San Francisco. They had come straight down and had left no noticeable hole in the forest canopy. The only piece of plane larger than a few square inches was the engine. The rest of the plane had burned or melted in the intense heat. There was no fire in the surrounding area when we arrived even though the heat must have been great when the plane crashed.

We left the scene with three hours of daylight remaining and kept hiking until midnight. Soon after dawn we met the coroner with a party of six and two packhorses. We made our way out and returned to base.

—“Rigger” Bob Snyder (Cave Junction '48)

Twelve new jumpers from Missoula (Region One) died in 1949 when they were caught in crown updrafts at the Mann Gulch Fire. I have a vivid memory of that fire because I had been alerted to suit up for a trip to Montana and had sat in the aircraft waiting to take off when a call came from Missoula. The caller said Region One jumpers were being put on the fire, and we were canceled.

—Hal Werner (North Cascades '48)  
Cape Coast, Ghana, West Africa

Maynard Shetler (Missoula '45) related his bad luck with the wind during the Seven Devils Fire. The strong breeze carried him so far that he ended about a mile from the drop site—but all was not plain sailing.

He crashed into an old tree near a river, and fortunately had an undergrowth of new trees 12–15 feet tall to break his plunge. The plane circled twice before Shetler said he was able to signal that he was all right.

The misfortune also plagued Marlyn, his brother, who got stuck in a tree and dangled his 80-foot rope. It wasn't seen by the men on the ground, so Marlyn began a descent on the rope and slipped, which burned holes in his gloves. He finally needed spurs to descend the rest of the tree.

One evening we jumped about dark to help Oliver Huset who hit a tree in landing. The top had broken out and Oliver received a concussion in the fall. We carried him throughout most of the night. I am sure those of us who help carry Oliver remember this event but I don't think Oliver remembers much about it.

—Jim Brunk (Missoula '45)

Phil Stanley started the action to organize the CPS smoke-jumpers. I thought that it was a good idea but doubted that he would succeed. My application was accepted for the second group. The other jumpers were likable, interesting and ready for the new adventure. The trainers were easy to work with. We were something new to them too.

—John Ainsworth  
(Missoula '43)

I volunteered for the smoke-jumpers in '44 but my project superintendent blocked my move. I tried again in 1945 and he agreed not to stop me. The work and the associations were the most thrilling and enjoyable assignment that I ever had.

—Luke Birky (Missoula '45)

### Did You Lose Your Rookie Jump Pin?

Here's a chance to get it replaced. Order item # 132 on the merchandise order form. Each pin is \$10.00. Only sold to smokejumpers listed in the NSA master database.

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# Member Profile:

## BEN CONNER

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(North Cascades '48)

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by Wallace "Pic" Littell (Missoula '44)

**I**n the case of Ben Conner, I feel well qualified to write his profile since we have been close friends for 58 years. In the summer of 1942, a fire suppression crew from Cornell College of Iowa served with the Coos County Fire Patrol in the Elliott State Forest in Oregon. That was Ben's and my first experience in fighting forest fires.

By 1948, I was on my fourth year of smokejumping and Ben, who had been in the Air Corps, began his training under the legendary Francis Lufkin. In 1949, Ben brought his bride, Marcia, to Winthrop where she found employment at the ranger station.

From the vantage point of age 77, Ben is quick to tell you that marrying Marcia and smokejumping stand out as two of the happiest events of his life. Professionally, that is saying something when you consider the fact that he went on to become a corporate vice president of a multibillion dollar corporation and to serve on the Board of Governors of the Electronic Industries Association. As to marrying Marcia, I was his best man in 1949 and have followed their marriage since. It has indeed been a happy one.

When he began training as a smokejumper in 1948, Ben had just graduated from Cornell College and was headed for law school at New York University. At Cornell, Ben was Midwest Conference Wrestling Champion at 175 lbs. and was on the team that won the NCAA Championship in 1947. We were jump partners that summer and one of his first fire jumps was my last.

After law school, Ben spent the majority of his career (1953–88) with AMP Inc. He is now retired in Florida but spends time in Pennsylvania during the summer and has two daughters, a son and eight grandchildren.

When I asked Ben to give me some lasting impressions of his three years as a smokejumper, he came up with the following account of a fire he jumped 50 years ago in Hell's Canyon. I am including it as an example of how vivid the memory of smokejumping is even though many years have past.

"The best job I ever had was smokejumping. Though each of us had numerous fires, usually one stands out that encompasses the whole experience. For



*Ben Conner 1948. (courtesy of Pic Littell)*

me it was the Hell's Canyon fire of 1950.

"Hell's Canyon, the Grand Canyon of the Snake River runs between Oregon and Idaho and is some 40 miles long. It is the deepest canyon in the United States, at one point a record 8,022 feet deep.

"From Winthrop four of us flew to a place on the rim of the canyon. Flying over the area we could see some small open grassy spots as well as rock slides. We were on the Oregon side of the canyon. My jump partner and I were the first two out. He initially headed for the canyon but managed to turn back into the jump spot.

"Three of us hit the open grassy spots, but Jim Putnam, later killed in Korea, was hung up in a tree with the fire coming in his direction. The three of us quickly raced down the slope to slow the fire until 'Put' could execute his letdown. Our cargo drop only included one canteen of water for each man. We dug

fire line but realized that we were too few to hold that line. Across the canyon, Idaho looked like nothing but rising smoke and flames.

"Day slipped into night as we worked to contain the fire. During the night as some of the rocky areas heated up, the rattlesnakes emerged and started the buzz that we heard as we built line. They were mad! I remember throwing dirt with one motion and then slashing with the backswing against the rattlers on the other side of me. All of this with only the light of the fire to see by. It was a little unnerving. As the trees would crown, the flaming cones would roll down spreading the fire. It looked like an assault on a medieval castle.

"By daylight things cooled down a bit and we took turns catching an hour's sleep. Two of our crew were sick, probably from dehydration, and we were exhausted. Early that morning the plane returned to check on us. They knew we were desperate for water and dropped several containers which, unfortunately, broke on landing. I couldn't help thinking of the irony of all that water in the Snake River below, but so far down as to be totally useless to us.

"Then as if by some miracle, three forest service rangers rode in on horseback, each with a number of canteens slung over their saddle horns. It was hard to drink slowly and not overdo it. The rangers immediately pitched in and we struggled to hold the fire line. Then the wind picked up and some trees started to crown. For me it was a blur. I remember a ranger and me leading three horses to safety out of the fire which was then on three sides of us. We were able to again regain control at our fallback position.

"The fire was seemingly under control and we were catching our breath leaning on a shovel when I noticed a remarkable thing along the ridge line. I could see a line of men. First there were ten, twenty, thirty, forty, fifty. I stopped counting. Eventually, around 200 firefighters came to relieve us. Were we ever glad to see them! Our gear was left for the packers and we were sent back. To this day I could not tell you how far we walked and rode in the back of a pickup to the airport, but it seemed an endless trek. We later learned just how lucky we were or what our efforts had achieved as 22,000 acres burned on the Idaho side of the canyon across from us.

"While I never had the intention of making smokejumping a career, I have been grateful all my life for the excellent training I received and for the opportunity to belong to that small, elite, distinguished brotherhood known as 'Smokejumpers.' They are the best!" 🦅

*Wallace W. "Pic" Littell, smokejumper 1944-45 Ninemile/MSO, 1947-48 Winthrop NCSB.*

*After training at Ninemile in 1944, Pic jumped in the CPS Smokejumper Unit for two years at Missoula. During the 1947-48 seasons, he jumped for Francis Lufkin at Winthrop.*

*He graduated Phi Beta Kappa from Cornell College of Iowa in 1947, moving on to Columbia University for his graduate work. He received his M.A. and Certificate of the Russian Institute there in 1949 and proceeded overseas into the Foreign Service in which he served until 1985. He was a Soviet and East European specialist and served in the former Soviet Bloc countries of USSR, Poland, Yugoslavia, East Germany and Hungary as Public Affairs Officer. His first assignment was in West Germany as both Cultural and Information Officer. He retired from the Foreign Service in 1985 at Minister Counselor MC-5 rank.*

*At Cornell College, Littell lettered in football, wrestling and track and was Midwest Conference Champion at 155 lbs in wrestling. He was also a member of the NCAA and NAAU National Championship Team in 1947. He is a member of the Cornell College Sports Hall of Fame. In his foreign service career, he received two Meritorious Service Awards for service in the former Soviet Union. He can be reached at: [wl21022pic@earthlink.net](mailto:wl21022pic@earthlink.net)*

## Ed Ward Named Missoula's New Base Manager

Ed Ward has been selected as the new base manager at Missoula. Jim Linville has been filling in as "acting" base manager since the retirement of Dave Custer.

Ed started his firefighting career on the Gila National Forest in 1977 and worked at the Niegrito Fire Base as a hotshot and helitack until 1979. He rookied at Missoula in 1980 and did most of his jumping in West Yellowstone and Silver City ending up with 70 fire jumps out of his 160 total.

In 1991 Ed became the facility operation leader for the Aerial Fire Depot. He was responsible for the air-tanker operations, maintenance at the depot, also hazardous material, and asbestos abatement for Region 1. Ed is transitioning into the job this month with the help of Jim "Dirty" Linville acting base manager.



## ODDS & ENDS

Got an e-mail from Gary "Tex" Welch (Cave Junction '60) last September. The rains had just ended the Montana fires but Texas was still in bad shape. Tex said, at that time, they had gone 68 days without rain and the temperature hit 111 degrees over Labor Day. His personal fire story, as follows, was pretty good:

"Last night I was getting dressed to go to the opera. Yeah, Waco has an occasional opera. Anyhow, about the time I started to put my tie on, a neighboring rancher calls and tells me that a grass fire is heading toward my ranch.

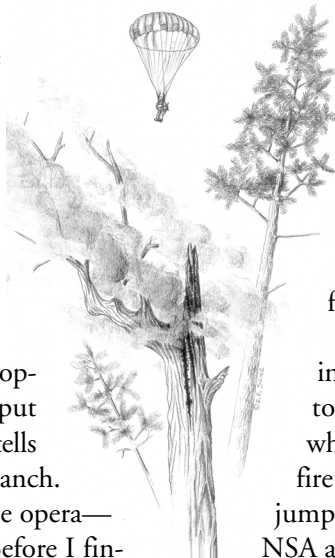
"I explain that I was just leaving for the opera—he said that he would handle it for me. Before I finish my tie, the phone rings again. The fire had jumped the highway and was building up a head of steam.

"Forget the opera! I have an underinsured house, to non-insured barns, three tractors, a backhoe, and about 160 tons of hay stored in the open. I quickly changed, threw all the hose I have into the back of the pickup, and headed for the ranch which is about 16 miles away. I could see the smoke from 10 miles and the flames from about a half-mile. It was headed for my house and hay!

"The local volunteer fire department had two pumpers on the fire but they had to leave to get more water. My jump partner John and I decided the best course of action was to put a line along the north flank and across the head of the fire, which was now moving slowly through my neighbor's trees. John and I built about three-quarters of a mile of scratch line on our first pass, and then widened it to about 20 feet and down to mineral soil. We did this in less than an hour. Where was John when I was jumping fires?

"If you doubt the length and width of the fire line in so short a time, you need to know that John's last name is Deere. We drug an old walking beam that weighs about 500 pounds up and down the fence line making about 15 passes in that time period. That much steel will cut down to mineral soil quickly."

**Greg Whipple** (Missoula '59) has added to this magazine with some of his illustrative work. He currently is doing a painting for the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center in Artesia, New Mexico. It seems they are creating a "Memorial Wall" designed to pay respect to border patrol officers lost in the line of duty. The painting Greg is doing shows two officers at a remote headstone somewhere along the Rio Grande and the



bronze (about 18" tall) will show a single officer in much the same scenario.

He is also preparing an 8 by 25 foot mural that will be a depiction of the border patrol history and will be placed in their national museum in El Paso.

**Jim Dawson** (Missoula '53) says that he found out about the NSA in an unusual way.

"I was doing some consulting work in 1995 in Botswana in southern Africa and happened to bump into three U.S. Forest Service types who were helping the Botswana government on fire control programs. One happened to be an ex-jumper out of Cave Junction who told me about NSA and how to make contact. The rest is history." The **Air America Association** will be holding a reunion in Las Vegas from May 31-June 3, 2001. Members of the association are planning a trip to Southeast Asia in September 2001. For information on these events and membership, call 830-931-3872 or write to the association at PO Box 1522, Castroville, TX 78009. The association has a Web site at [www.air-america.org](http://www.air-america.org).

**Bob Webber** (Missoula '62) shot about eight hours of video at **Reunion 2000**. Right now he has two 4-hour raw tapes edited down to 5 hours and 15 minutes. Stay tuned for details on how you might obtain this valuable piece of history.

A #1 pilot **Wally Tower** wrote recently about the great time he had at Reunion 2000. "Most gratifying to me was the recognition of the smokejumper pilots. In my 23 years in aviation and fire (8 seasons as a jumper pilot and 16 years as Region 6 regional air officer), I could count on one hand the number of times pilots were ever mentioned at meetings." *Editor's note: Wally makes a good point. We as smokejumpers tend to think that we're the whole show when we're just part of the "team." The pilots are a very important part of that team!*

**Dayton Grover** (Missoula '55) writes complimenting *Smokejumper* magazine, the cover pictures and the article by Delos Dutton on smokejumping in Region 8. Dayton mentions that the magazine takes a long time to get to his address in Missouri. The bulk mailings take up to a month to get east of the Rockies.

**Herb Hidu** (North Cascades '56) made an important comment in a note concerning the possible closing of some smokejumper bases. "There is a huge factor the economists are neglecting entirely. That is, the smoke-jumper experience is a priceless rite of passage, which

motivates the participants on to greater things. There are many former smokejumpers that are now represented in the highest echelons of land and forest management and other fields." Herb is currently an emeritus professor of marine science at the University of Maine.

**Bob Whaley** (Missoula '56) informs us that the Ford Trimotor airplane kits are available for \$11.45 at The Treasure Chest, 1612 Benton Ave., Missoula, MT 59801. (406) 549-7992.

Some of the most important work done for the NSA has been the creation of a master smokejumper database by **Roger Savage** (Missoula '57). Roger's accuracy is outstanding. This editor has had three names submitted this month alone by jumpers who run across other "jumpers" in their community or travels. The named individuals claimed to have been smokejumpers. We are always on the lookout to add the "missing" to our database and increase the information. The first clue that something was wrong with these people came with a check of the database and the absence of their names. Further checking confirmed that these individuals were "impostors." Thanks Roger for your great work!

Every NSA member should have a copy of *Twentieth Century Smokejumpers 1940-1999*. It is item #130 available for \$18.00.

**Billy Bennett** (West Yellowstone '98) earlier had encouraged us to get something written about the smoke-jumper operations "back east." From there the article written by **Delos Dutton** (Missoula '51) was written for the October issue of *Smokejumper*. Billy responds: "Thanks for talking Dee Dutton into writing the R-8 smokejumping article. I really enjoyed it. The fires I worked were in North Carolina and were ones that jumpers had already jumped. I don't remember any of the jumper's names other than on one fire the jumper-in-charge was 'George.' Any radio communication was directed to 'Jumper George.' We school boys got a kick out of that. I was surprised at the number of fire jumps made. I had no idea they would be able to jump that many fires as it gets real windy here in the southeast."

Billy is currently working for the South Carolina Forestry Commission as an arson investigator. His agency allowed him to be on hotshot crews in Redmond and on the Tahoe in California. In 1998 he rookied at age 42. "In 1976 when our forestry school fire crew rounded a curve in the mountains of North Carolina I saw the FS-12s hanging in the trees above our fire. Little did I know that 22 years later I would be hanging in my own chute in the trees."

**Earl Schmidt** (Missoula '44) has forwarded some more information on the CPS 103 reunion, which will be held at Glacier Mountain Lodge in Hungry Horse, Montana. Tentative starting date is Tuesday, July 16, 2002, and will run for three days. Look for more information as it is received.

**Ray Caryl** (pilot NCSB 76/77) responded with an e-mail the other day. "As a new member you made me feel right at home. The photo on page 31 of the July issue of *Smokejumper* revealed three guys I've known. Jim Larkin looks the same as he did in 1982. Red Myler was my first boss in the forest service. He hired me to fly for him in 1974 in Region Eight. He was hands down the finest man I've ever worked for. I met Wally Tower in Red's office one day as he was passing through Atlanta. I think Wally was flying in Mexico on the Screw Worm project. Ah, the stories those guys could tell ... Red is gone now. He passed away just a few years after he retired in the early '80s. Don't know about the other guys. Anyway, its good to be "back in the family."

**Murry Taylor** (Redding '65) checked in the other day and says his book, *Jumping Fire*, is still selling well and should go to a paperback edition next fall.

He updates his activities:

"Hello and greetings to all. Here's the latest stuff on *Jumping Fire*. The book has been selected by the *LA Times* for their 'Best Books of 2000' list. Of course, that made me feel great, plus I got a lot of attaboys from publicist and agent and editors, etc. Also another neat deal, the book is going to be reviewed in the *New York Times*.

This is my most exciting news. Victoria, my agent, got a call from Warner Bros yesterday, the same people that did *The Perfect Storm*. The person she talked to had read the book and liked the idea of it possibly becoming a movie. He wanted to meet with a couple people then get back to us. We've had one other team of screenwriters inquire about it as well. While it seems a long shot that they'd ever make a movie, it certainly has made great excitement in my brain including wild imaginings of on-set technical advising, lighting off hue make-believe forest fires, flying in helicopters, filming from jumpships, camping in the wilds, arguing with movie-mogul directors, flirting with starlets, and then, of course, Hollywood premiers, marquee lights, lines of black limos, tuxedos, and deep V-cut dresses. Yaaahoooo! I think I could handle that kind of action. Don't you?

Like I say, it probably won't really happen, but hell I sure wish it would. Anyway, that's it. I'm fine. Spending mornings answering fan e-mail and phone calls, then the afternoons out in the woods thinning and



Eugene "Jake" Dougherty (Missoula '48) taken in July 1949 before freefall jump in Missoula.

burning burn piles. Also getting a lot of reading done and starting a file for a second book going back twenty-five years to early Alaska jumping and the T-Hanger days.

If all this glory hound nonsense disgusts you, I do apologize. Sincerely, I mean. But really, isn't this what we all (down deep) hope happens to some nice person like me. And just think, maybe someday you'll find yourself saying, "I knew him back when, ..." or more likely, "Hell, I thought I knew him back when ... but now he's a jerk."

"The Drinking Gourd," an interesting, well researched newsletter by **Titus Nelson** (NCSB 66) covers a broad range of timely topics that are interesting and helpful in plotting your course through the maze of shortages, the changing economy, new markets. He points out new and interesting opportunities that you may be missing. "The Drinking Gourd" can be found at [www.drinkinggourd.com](http://www.drinkinggourd.com) where you can register to have the newsletter emailed to you—free. While there you can read his previous newslet-

ters and chase some links into our changing reality. Redding Base Manager **Arlen Cravens** informs us that congratulations are in order to the following:

**Luis Gomez**, **Dan Hernandez**, **Josh Mathiesen** and **Jerry Spence** all accepted promotions to GS-7 squad leader positions. About a month ago **Bob Bente** (Training Battalion), **Scott Brockman**, **Tim Quigley** (Loft Battalion) and **Don Sand** (operations chief) accepted promotions to GS-8 smokejumper captain positions.

Got a nice note from **Skip Stratton** (Missoula '47) who was featured in the July 2000 issue along with some great pictures taken of the 1949 jump in Washington, D.C. "I do want to congratulate you and whomever helps with the magazine. It is great and will most certainly retain members and be very important in getting new members." *Editor's note: We'll always take comments like this!*

**Gregg Phifer** (Missoula '44) informs us that the CPS 103 smokejumper reunion will be held starting at noon on Tuesday, July 16, 2002, at the Glacier Mountain Bible Camp in Hungry Horse, Montana. **Tedford Lewis** (Missoula '43) will be heading up the event.

Even though retired from teaching at Florida State University, Gregg is still credentialed as a master official, USA Track and Field, and works the long and triple jumps at all home meets.

*Smokejumper* magazine will have an interesting article on **Stan Tate** (McCall '53) coming up in a future issue. The article is by David Johnson of the *Lewiston Tribune* and deals with the work that Stan had done with two men on death row. Tate and one of the men recently met at a seminar at Princeton University. Stan says "I spoke in the very same room at Princeton where my great grandfather gave the commencement address in 1865 during the Civil War. We both spoke on 'rights for black people'—what a small world."

**Michael Steppe** (Idaho City '61) mentions that on page 27 of the January 2001 issue he noticed a letter from Phil Robertson. "Phil and I grew up together in Silver City, New Mexico. We worked on the Gila growing up and got to know smokejumping by packing jumpers off fires late in the season after the Bell G3 left for Idaho for their fire season. Phil is the best man I have ever been with in the back country—he is a natural. He now teaches forest ecology summers in Red Lodge, Montana, for Southern Illinois University. Phil jumped out of Missoula and I jumped out of Idaho City."

Life Member **Ben Musquez** (Missoula '56) passes along the information that Associate Member **Chris Rodriguez** suffered a stroke on Christmas day and has

been hospitalized in San Antonio, Texas. Chris and his wife Gloria have been very generous givers to *Smokejumper* magazine allowing us to increase the size of the issues. We wish Chris a speedy recovery and thank him for his help.

Heard that **Bob Hooper** (Cave Junction '67) is getting close to retirement. He has been working for the Federal Bureau of Prisons for a total of 16 plus years and also has 25 years in with the U.S. Army Reserves as a medic and physician's assistant. Bob coached and taught for 12 years before going to work for the Bureau of Prisons. He works with the University of Arizona as a Masters level track and field official.

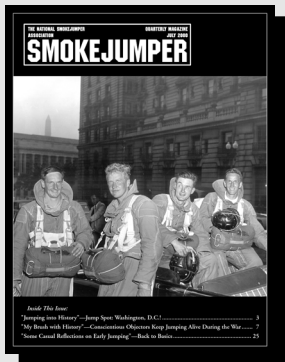
**Oliver Huset** (Missoula '44) has been attending some seminars at Williston State College (ND) on the Lewis and Clark Expedition. He had taken a fall and is recuperating with a "bum" shoulder. His new Celestron Nex-Star telescope is providing an opportunity to "gaze at the stars" and develop a new hobby.

**Vance Warren** (Missoula '54) sends compliments to all

those who worked to make the Redding Reunion such a success. He also complimented Jeff Fereday on the Alaska *Smokejumper* fishing story that ran in the January issue.

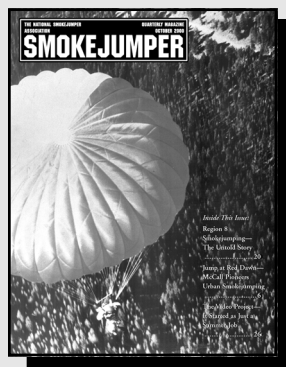
**Derrek Hartman** (Redding '98) wants to remind all the readers: "We are still planning a 50-year reunion at the West Yellowstone base. We are planning to have it somewhere around the middle of July. Folks can start calling the base around the middle of June to get information."

**Dan O'Rourke** (Cave Junction '46) forwarded an extensive article on smokejumping from the *Tampa Tribune* November 20, 2000, issue. The article in the "Bay Life" section was sparked by **Wayne Williams'** (Missoula '77) speaking appearance at an annual insurance-risk conference in St. Petersburg, Florida. **WW** is currently a foreman at Missoula and is a frequent guest speaker at meetings. 🧠



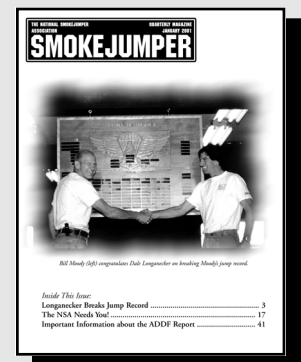
# SMOKEJUMPER

## BACK ISSUES ARE AVAILABLE



There is a limited number of copies available of the July 2000, October 2000 and January 2001 editions of *Smokejumper* magazine.

Each copy is \$3.50 S/H included. Use the merchandise order form or write it out.



# Mike Malone—A Hero Honored

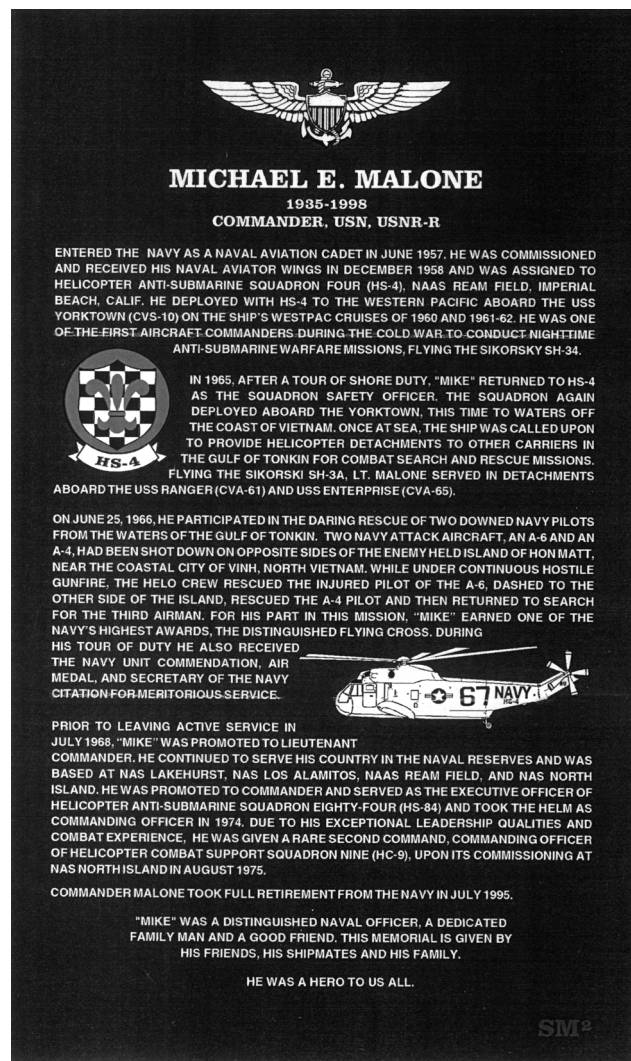
by Bob Whaley (Missoula '56)

On March 11, 2000, I had the pleasure of attending a ceremony commemorating the military life of **Mike Malone** (Missoula '53). The ceremony was conducted in Charleston, South Carolina, in conjunction with a reunion of Mike's active duty Navy helicopter squadron. Mike was highly regarded by all those with whom he served, on active duty as well as his naval reserve service. Those who knew Mike can appreciate this repute as he was one of a kind, a man respected in every endeavor he challenged.

A bronze plaque was dedicated at the March 11th ceremony and placed in hangar bay of the, now retired, USS *Yorktown*. Mike flew from the *Yorktown* during his naval career. It is now birthed in Charleston Bay at Patriots Point and serves as a naval air museum. The museum features numerous aircraft in addition to notable navy and marine aviators dating back to WWII and before. Mike is in good company and so are they.

After his naval career, Mike went on to fly for United Airlines retiring to his home at Flathead Lake, Montana, in 1995. Mike died of a heart attack in December 1998.

He was married to Ella Fitzpatrick Malone for 35 years before his untimely death. 🕯



## No, I Will Not Jump!

by Bob Whaley (Missoula '56)

For some of the older jumpers in Missoula, you might recall an incident which involved Mike in his first year as a squad leader. It was my first year in the program. I consulted Jack Demmons and Kenny Roth to help fill in the details.

It was a hot summer afternoon in August 1956, and Mike was the spotter on a two-manner in Idaho. They were flying in the Travelaire and Mike had just dropped the jumpers. He removed his chute and climbed into the co-pilot's seat beside Frank Small for the ride home. Mike had always wanted to get some "stick time" in anticipation of going into the U.S. Navy's flight training program in Pensacola, Florida.

He was barely strapped in when Frank got very ill and told Mike to put his chute back on and prepare to jump. Frank was sweating profusely and was very pale. He didn't improve and directed Mike to jump. Mike refused to jump choosing to stay with Frank. He could see that Frank was struggling. They diverted the aircraft to Elk City, Idaho, where they made an emergency landing.

Mike ran into Elk City to get help but when they returned they found Frank had died. He had suffered a severe heart attack in flight. Conjecture has it that Frank only stayed alive long enough to get Mike and the aircraft safely on the ground.

Kenny Roth and Penn Stohr flew a Cessna 172 to Elk City to retrieve the Travelaire, Frank's body and Mike. This action was typical of Mike. He would never leave a friend in trouble even if it meant facing great danger to himself. 🕯

# Joe Blackburn Finishes Law Enforcement Career

by Carl Gidlund

Joe Blackburn says he became a smokejumper because rodeoing was just too tough.

"I was on the rodeo team at the University of Montana, got bucked off, and woke up in the hospital. Decided then that I wanted to do something safer."

He found that "safe" job exactly a half-century ago, training at the Nine Mile Base near Missoula in the summer of 1951 after a single season in fire control as a lookout in Glacier National Park.

Still saddle-leather tough, the short, wiry career cop recounts his career:

Joe's smokejumping lasted three seasons, through the summer of '53, all out of Missoula. But his parachuting days continued until about 15 years ago when he made his most recent free-fall.

He earned an Army commission through ROTC while studying for his wildlife degree, graduated from jump school at Fort Benning, Ga., then jumpmaster training while serving as a platoon leader with the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division at Fort Bragg, N.C.

Following his discharge, Joe began a career with the Idaho Department of Fish and Game in 1957. His assignments as an enforcement officer took him to small towns throughout the state. That precluded him from continuing his military career

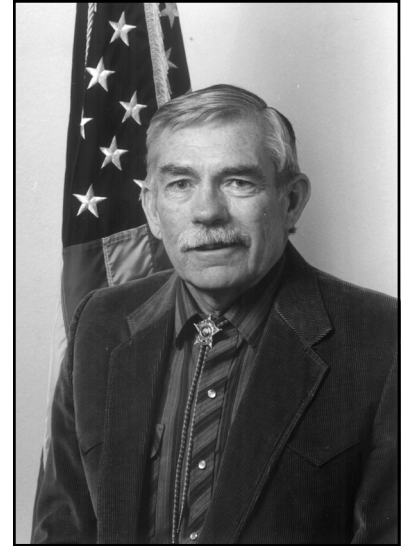


*A half-century ago, Joe Blackburn learned letdowns at the Nine Mile base. (courtesy Joe Blackburn)*

until an assignment in North Idaho permitted him to join a Special Forces reserve unit in Spokane. He resumed his parachuting with the Army for about 21 more years, finally retiring as a major with 125 jumps.

Joe is also out of law enforcement—at least temporarily—after his retirement in January as a one-term sheriff of Benewah County, the heart of the old St. Joe National Forest. That followed 30 years as an Idaho game warden, three years as an outfitter in the Middle Fork of the Salmon River country, nine years as an undercover investigator for the Idaho Outfitters and Guides Licensing Board, and part-time Benewah County marine deputy for four years.

His duties with the outfitters'



*SADDLE LEATHER TOUGH. Joe Blackburn retired in January 2001 from his job as Benewah County sheriff in Idaho's panhandle.*

association, he explains, included booking with unlicensed outfitters and guides. "But that doesn't mean they weren't good. Did some of my best steelhead fishing with those guys, before I busted them. I helped a couple later get licensed, and still go fishing with them," he says.

Joe has no regrets about turning in his sheriff's badge this January. "Too much politics and not enough money to do the job," he says, noting that he and his six deputies were responsible for an 800 square mile area where methamphetamine "factories" are discovered on a nearly weekly basis.

He'll remain in North Idaho, "pretty much just fishing" he says, but the Blackburn name will continue in police work. One of



his sons is a deputy sheriff, another was, and a third of his and Peggy's six children are in law enforcement for the Coast Guard.

A highlight of his smoke-jumping days was appearing as an extra in *Red Skies of Montana* and downing beers with stars Richard Widmark and Richard Boone. A "lowlight," he says, was the packouts from fires in those days

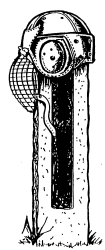
before helicopters became a favored means of leaving the woods.

But what sticks with him most is the cost of boots. "Not too long ago I bought a pair of White packers for \$300 and some," he says. I remember when I started jumping, at \$1.45 an hour—and straight time for overtime—I bought my first pair

of Whites. Dragstead's Department Store in Missoula let us pay them off on the installment plan over the summer because \$29.95 was just too darn much at one whack."

Fifty years does make a difference. 📞

*Carl Gidlund can be reached at: gidlund1@earthlink.net*



## Off The List

We want to know! If you learn of the serious illness or death of a member of the smokejumper community, whether or not he or she is a member, your Association wants to know about it. We would like to express your Associations's sentiments and

spread the word to others. Please phone, write or e-mail our Missoula headquarters and/or our webmaster (webmaster-@smokejumpers.com) including the name, address and phone number of the subject's next of kin. We'll take it from there.

### **Wilbur "Mick" Burke** (Missoula '49)

Mick Burke, 73, died Nov. 26, 2000, at the Mercy Medical Center in Redding, Calif.

Born in Oregon City, Ore., Sept. 18, 1927, he was a Forest Service smokejumper out of Missoula from 1949 through 1954. He moved to Shasta County, Calif., in 1955 from Kalispell, Mont.

Mick served in the U.S. Army Air Corps during World War II, and worked as a surveyor for the California Department of Transportation. He was a member of the National Smokejumpers Association. Survivors include his wife, Edna, three daughters and a son, nine grandchildren and one great grandchild.

Condolences may be sent to Mrs. Edna Burke, 1381 Pinon Ave., Anderson, CA 96007-4038. 📞

### **Calvin Orthel Mason** (Pendleton, '45)

Calvin, an original member of the 555<sup>th</sup> Parachute Infantry Battalion ("Triple Nickles") died Dec. 14, 2000. Born in Ft. Gibson, Okla., Aug. 21, 1928, he moved with his family to Kansas City, Mo., as a child and attended schools in that city. He then enlisted in the U.S. Army, serving until his discharge in 1970.

The Forest Service and the Army trained the Triple Nickles, the first all-black paratroop unit in the world, as smokejumpers in 1945. Working out of Pendleton, Ore., and Chico, Calif., they were dropped to fires throughout the Northwest during that summer.

After his retirement from the military, Calvin

settled in Clarksville, Tenn., worked for the American National Life Insurance Co. and was active in the Masonic Lodge, St. John Missionary Baptist Church and the 555<sup>th</sup> Parachute Infantry Association.

He leaves a wife, Elnora, five children, seven grandchildren and three great-grandchildren.

Condolences may be sent to Mrs. Calvin Mason, 310 Copeland Rd., Clarksville, Tenn. 37042. 📞

## **NSA Associate's Book Honored by the *New York Times***

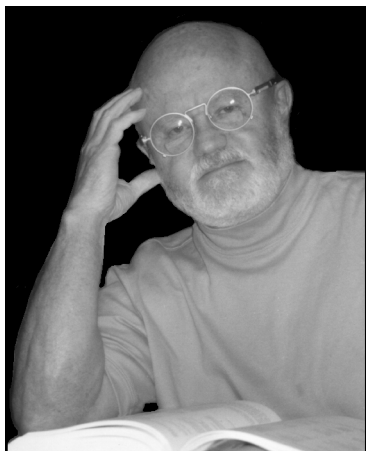
*Smokejumper* staff artist, author/illustrator Chris Demarest's latest book, *Firefighters A To Z*, was recently named to the Top Ten Best Picture Books for 2000 by the *New York Times*. "Mr. Demarest's big and brashly colorful pictures will allow every child to feel the heroic proportions of firefighting." This book was based on his experiences as a volunteer firefighter and reaches children in the 5-6 year old age group although many adults enjoy the artwork.

Last summer Chris visited the smokejumper base in Redding, California, for research on his current book, *Smokejumpers 1 To 10*. Using the numbers format it takes the reader through one cycle of firefighting with more of the tremendous artwork by Mr. Demarest. This book will be out in spring 2002.

For those wishing personalized copies of *Firefighters A To Z*, send a check for \$18.20 (postage included) to:

Chris Demarest  
PO Box 201  
Lyme, NH 03768

If this is a gift for your children or grandchildren, please include their name so that the book can be personalized. 📞



# Jump List—

by **Bill Eastman** (North Cascades '54)

*The "Jump List" is a compilation of information the National Smokejumper Association receives from members, associates and friends. It is intended to inform our readers what members are doing and where they reside. You can mail your information to Bill Eastman: PO Box 306, East Greenbush, NY 12061 or e-mail at [eastman@earthlink.net](mailto:eastman@earthlink.net)*

## Alaska

**Richard E. Burns**, '64, after jumping fire and graduating from Southern Oregon College, worked as a photogrammetrist and cartographer for the Air Force and for the Forest Service. In 1975, he switched his career to oil field drilling/fluids engineering. Dick retired in 1991, but continues to work as a consultant, living in Roseburg, Ore.

## Boise

**Dustin Matsuoka**, '93, has been working as a paramedic in Twin Falls. He will return to Boise to jump during the 2001 season—"Ho ya!!"

## Cave Junction

**Glen W. McBride**, '59, after earning a B.S. degree from Portland State University, worked for Weyerhaeuser and then for the Chrysler Corporation. Since 1988, he has been in the USDA Food-Safety Inspection System, working first in the San Francisco Bay Area as a food technologist and processing inspector. Glen is now the Portland Relief Food-Safety Inspector. Living in Tigard, Ore., (suburban Portland) he travels the Pacific Northwest to inspect all types of operations.

**Melvin E. Berrien**, '57, worked for five years as a fire-control officer in the El Dorado National Forest and then became the fire prevention officer. Mel retired after 35 years in the Forest Service and now lives in Hayfork, Calif.

## McCall

**Melanie L. Dunton**, '99, graduated from Boise State College last May. Mel worked as a cow milker and as a Sawtooth hotshot before jumping fire. She lives in Reno, Nev.

**John E. Donelson**, '63, was a Peace Corps volunteer in Ghana, and then earned his Ph.D. from Cornell in biochemistry. Since 1974, John has been a professor at the University of Iowa in Iowa City.

**Guy G. Hurlbutt**, '62, after earning a degree in forestry, a degree in law, and a masters in law, worked at various legal jobs in government and in private practice. He was U.S. attorney for Idaho for three years and an attorney for Boise Cascade for three. Guy is now vice-president for public policy and the environment at Boise Cascade.

**Dick Graham**, '58, jumped for eight years, and then worked as an air-operations officer for Inter-mountain Aviation and for Continental Air Services. He also spent two years in Vietnam as an air-operations officer before going to Washington, D.C., for two years with the Department of the Army. Dick has been teaching fourth grade in Payette since 1990.

**Ronald L. Siple**, '53, after jumping fire and then serving as an officer in the Marine Corps, became a sales representative for General Electric. He retired in 1989 as the regional manager for 12 western states. Ron now lives in Greenwood Village, Colo.

**Stan D. Tate**, '53, jumped for six years. Since earning his master's degree from the Princeton Seminary in 1958, he has been an Episcopal priest



*An experiment that failed. This is the first and last time that the "Merry Packer" was dropped to be used for a packout. L-R: Bill Eastman, Mel Northcut and Mike Bowman. Okanogan N.F. July 1955. (courtesy of Bill Eastman)*

and a Presbyterian pastor. Stan has officiated at more than 125 smokejumper baptisms, weddings, and burials. Living in Moscow, Idaho, he is retired, but does some consulting in the area of biomedical ethics.

**H. Reid Jackson**, '49, jumped for eight years, and was the project leader at McCall for the last four of those eight. He had earned a degree in forest management and became a district ranger, then a fire-staff officer, a deputy forest supervisor, and finally retired in 1986 as the forest supervisor of the Bridger-Teton Forest. Reid lives in Jackson, Wyo., does a lot of hunting and fishing, and travels some.

**Clyde A. Hawley**, '47, after jumping for seven years, Clyde went to work for Philips Petroleum in radiation safety. He then spent 20 years with the Atomic Energy Commission, and another 15 as an independent consultant on nuclear power plant safety. Clyde says, since 1995, he has been "savoring the process of life,"

which we take to mean he is retired. He lives in Salmon, Idaho.

**Willard Wyatt**, '46, was an officer in the Army for 28 years, serving in Korea and in Vietnam. After retiring from the Army, Bud taught in Denver public schools for 18 years. He retired again and moved to Clovis, Calif., in 1995.

## Missoula

**Guy J. Thompson**, '77, jumped for eight years. Since 1986, he has been a city fireman, and Guy is now a lieutenant in the Kent, Wash., Fire Department.

**Bruce R. Sievers**, '60, after earning his Ph.D. in political science from Stanford, worked as the research director at the Montana Constitutional Convention, as a legislative assistant to U.S. Senator Leo Metcalf, as

assistant professor of political science at Montana State University, and as executive director of the Montana Committee for the Humanities. He then became the executive director of the California Council for the Humanities. Living in Tiburon, Calif., Bruce is now the executive director for the Walter and Elise Haas Fund.

**Barrie H. Turner**, '59, after jumping fire and jumping with the 101st Airborne Division, served as a U.S. Army helicopter pilot, flying gunships in Vietnam. In 1966, Barrie became a civilian helicopter pilot for Condor Helicopters and then for Aspen Helicopters in Oxnard. He says that he is "still flying agriculture in Ventura and in Santa Barbara Counties." Barrie lives in Ventura, Calif.

**Carl P. Scheid**, '58, spent 32 years in the foreign service of the U.S. Department of State. Pat now lives in Rockville, Md., spending his time banding raptors

for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, volunteering in hospices, and painting wildlife.

**Ron W. Swenson**, '57, earned a master's degree from the University of Montana. Ron was an elementary school teacher for eight years and is now an art teacher in Great Falls, Mont.

**Gerald E. Schmidt**, '54, earned a degree in law from the University of Denver, then practiced law and planned estates until 1993. Since then Gerald has been drilling oil wells. He lives in Billings, Mont.

**Charles J. Viviano**, '53, worked in California oil fields for three years, then, in 1959, became a fireman for the county of Los Angeles. Charles retired in 1990 as captain of the L.A. County Fire Department. He lives in Cypress, Calif.



*"Ya know, Bill, the stress of jumpin' these September two-manners could cause a guy real problems during ski season." (courtesy Greg Whipple)*

## Nine-Mile

**Don Dayton**, '48, completed a 30-year career with the National Park Service, retiring to Santa Fe after nine years as a deputy regional director. He fought several large fires in Glacier and Sequoia National Parks during his career. While at Glacier National Park, Don was presented with the Department of Interior Award for Valor for rescuing a boy from a grizzly bear attack.

## North Cascades

**John P. Spencer**, '98, is still jumping fire. Jack is also a teacher at Wenatchee High School.

**Craig A. Boesel**, '66, had his own dairy for five years, bottling and selling his own milk. Craig now lives in Winthrop and works for a cattle rancher with a 200-head herd.

**Lee Hotchkiss**, '63, has been a pastor in Bend, Ore., and in Rockford, Ill. Lee is now head pastor at the Evangelical Free Church in Chico, Calif.

**Earl I. (Tony) Percival**, '54, jumped for 15 years and then went to work for the National Advanced Research Technology Center, training firefighters. He retired in Tucson in 1985 and worked as a warehouse man for the local school district. After retiring a second time in 1966, Tony began wildfire dispatching. He's still at it and says, "It's still fun!"

**Robert I. Pino**, '51, jumped for five years. Bob worked 33 years for Boeing in production control and industrial engineering. He recently retired, living in Seattle.

**Edward R. Summerfield**, '47, was a surface line officer in the navy for 20 years. His second career was with the Washington State Department of Natural Resources as a timber sales manager. Ed retired in Olympia in 1996 and is now "wearing out old clothes."

## Redding

**Ron P. Omont**, '78, is still jumping. He is a senior rigger, a spotter, and a squad leader.

**Michael R. Gutierrez**, '77, has been a fireman in the Orange County Department, a fire inspector for the El Monte Fire Department, and a plans examiner for the Corona Fire Department. Mike is now fire inspector II in Corona, Calif., and an adjunct instructor at Crafton Hills College.

**Lloyd Lyle Rice**, '65, was with the San Jose Police Department for 28 years, retiring in 1995 as a lieutenant in Special Operations. In retirement, Lyle is a touring kayak guide and instructor, and an evaluator of community-policing federal grants. He lives in Aptos, Calif.

## Redmond

**Ron E. Rau**, '86, earned a degree in forest management and went to work for the Shasta-Trinity Forest as a TSI forester in the Hayfork District. In 1992, he moved to Alabama to become the silviculturist for the Bunkhead Ranger District. Since 1997, Ralph has been the silviculturist for the Bayan District in the Ozark National Forest.

**Steven A. Schmokel**, '66, is a pilot with American Airlines, living in Guenes Island, Wash.

## Pilots

**Randy G. Leypoldt** has been a smokejumper pilot since 1989, working under contract with ERA Aviation and Corporate Air. Randy spends half of his time in Anchorage, Alaska, flying for ERA Aviation and the other half in Buhl, Idaho, with the Buhl Fire Department.

## Associates

**Kenneth R. Knoerr**, before earning his Ph.D. from Yale in forest meteorology, worked as a snow hydrologist at the Donner Pass Forest Experimental Station. Since 1961, Ken has been a professor of environmental meteorology and hydrology at Duke University in Durham, N.C.

**Dorene E. Perkins** is self-employed as a freelance secretary. After graduating from the Sawyer College of Business, Dorene has worked for the University of Chicago and for McGraw-Hill, among other clients. She lives in Monee, Ill., and can be reached at (708) 534-8196 or dorenep@ev1.net. ☎

# SMOKEJUMPER MILESTONES

Smokejumpers often talk about and compare job-related statistics. Most know the exact number of practice jumps and fire jumps they have made and who at their base had the most. Others know the exact number of jumps they need for their next jump pin. Most know who made the most tree landings, rigged the most chutes, or managed to travel the most. It is rare to meet an ex-jumper who cannot tell you how many jumps they made even if it has been 50 years since the last one.

Up until now this information has been spread via word of mouth and for the most part been confined to individual bases. To preserve some of our history and for your enjoyment the *Smokejumper* magazine is beginning to accumulate and publish these accomplishments. Below is a list of the initial categories.

Beginning with the July issue of *Smokejumper* magazine we will print one or more of the various categories, continuing issue by issue. Please send your nominations/marks to [burgon@bendnet.com](mailto:burgon@bendnet.com) or mail them to: Ted Burgon, 55605 Big River Drive Bend, OR 97707 (Fax 541-593-5887).

See Mark Corbet's "let-down" story below that may well stand the test of time and be a record in that area.

"Milestones" will be published in the succeeding issues beginning with:

1. Number of states jumped (fire and practice)
2. Fire jumps in a single season
3. Highest elevation landing (fire)
4. Highest elevation landing (nonfire)
5. Longest letdown
6. Farthest west fire jump

Send in your marks to Ted Burgon. 📧

## Record Big Tree Landing?

by Mark Corbet (LaGrande '74)

In mid July of 1970 a mega-bust was underway in Washington State. Booster crews from various bases were jumping fires out of NCSB. Mike C. Hill, a second year jumper from McCall had just returned from a fire jump near the Canadian border when a fire call came in for the Olympic National Park. Four jumpers and a spotter loaded into Twin Beech, N165Z. Their pilot was Dave Russell in his first of many years as a qualified jumper pilot. They flew west



*Historic Picture: Foremen Glenn Smith and Wagner Dodge at Seeley Lake in 1943. (courtesy of Earl Schmidt)*

across the North Cascades, the city of Seattle, and crossed Puget Sound to Port Angeles on the Olympic Peninsula. There they refueled and conferred with Park Service personnel before continuing on their mission.

Conditions were sunny and warm under high pressure that day on the Olympic. Spotter, Bill Moody, dropped two Missoula jumpers near Mt. Olympus then flew southwest to the Bob Creek Shelter fire with the two remaining jumpers. The fire was approximately 28 miles inland from the ocean, small but in heavy timber estimated to be 250 feet tall. Bill and Mike talked it over and decided that a quarter acre patch of brush and smaller timber in the creek bottom was the only usable jump spot. Further back in the Beech, a lone rookie looked on. The first set of streamers went about 250 to 300 yards, the second set made it into the edge of brush patch. Mike Hill was dropped first, single stick. In his words "As I was coming down the patch of brush appeared much taller, the trees gigantic, and the 'pucker factor' began increasing. Deciding not to go into the towering brush I aimed for the timber and had the nanosecond thrill of guiding my chute around huge tree trunks below the over-story. It became very dark very quickly. After





(Courtesy of Ken Gouff)

making it to the ground and reciting some long forgotten prayers, I heard the plane circling and my jump partner Larry, yelling from far away.”

Bill Moody recalls that Larry Hyde, an NCSB rookie with only two previous fire jumps, did a good job up until the last but hung up near the edge of the spot. He had landed in the top of a tree that was growing out of a steep hillside and had a bit of a downhill lean. Larry began his letdown using the 250-foot letdown rope jumpers are given when heading to the Olympic from NCSB. As if the tree was not tall enough already, the total distance to the ground increased even more due to the downhill lean. He would touch ground well down hill from the base of the big tree.

From the ground Mike was able to see a speck of orange through a tiny break in the foliage and headed toward it. As he got closer he made his way toward the sound of Larry’s voice.

When Mike arrived, Larry had used up nearly all of his rope but was, according to Mike, “30 to 40 feet from the ground and hanging well away from the trunk of the fir that caught his chute.” Mike climbed up a nearby smaller tree with his letdown rope, tied a stick to the end of it and threw it between Larry’s risers. George Steele recalls Larry telling him over beers, some years later, that due to the length of rope above him, he was slowly rotating as he dangled there.

Needless to say, throwing a stick with a rope attached, from the top of a nearby tree, at a moving target, was a bit of a challenge for Mike. Larry also told George he remembered getting hit in the back with the stick a time or two. Once the successful throw was made, Mike pulled Larry over to the tree he was in. Now standing on some branches in the smaller tree with Mike, Larry released the rope attached to his chute. They ran the end of the rope Mike had brought up the tree, through Larry’s rings then tied off to the tree. Larry completed his repel to the ground 30 to 40 feet below and Mike climbed back down.

Once back at NCSB the two jumpers measured the ropes to determine how far Larry’s letdown had been. From the tie off in the small tree to the ground was approximately 30 feet. Larry’s 250-foot letdown rope was actually only 240 feet long for a total of 270 feet.

Thanks to Mike Hill, Bill Moody, and George Steele for their help researching the details of this piece of smokejumper history. And thanks to the central character, Larry Hyde, your memory lives on. 🙏

*Mike Hill jumped out of McCall from 1969 through 1971 and Grangeville from 1973 through 1983. He is now a school principal in central Idaho.*

## ***NSA Members—Save This Information***

Please contact the following persons directly if you have business or questions:

***Smokejumper Magazine & Merchandise***  
Articles, change of mailing address, orders  
Chuck Sheley 530-893-0436  
10 Judy Ln  
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cnkgsheley@earthlink.net

***Membership***  
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Olympia WA 98503  
JUMPERCJ63@aol.com

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# NSA Guestbook

*Our Web site, [www.smokejumpers.com](http://www.smokejumpers.com), gets about 700 hits per day. One of the many features of our Web site is the "guestbook" where individuals log on with their comments.*

*Here is a recent sampling over the past months:*

Dad was a smokejumper in the '50s. I have been a volunteer firefighter for almost 20 years. I represented our VFD at the memorial to the Storm King firefighters. Definitely the hardest shift I ever pulled for the Department. Keep up the great work, those of us that live up here in the mountains sure appreciate it (we also appreciate your families who have to give you up every summer).

—Carol Dollard ([batsomtn@ix.netcom.com](mailto:batsomtn@ix.netcom.com))

Just returned from the reunion 2000 in Redding. Terrific event! Thanks to Dave Nelson, Chief Arranger—to Carl Gidlund, outgoing president of NSA and all the Redding jumpers who served on the Committee putting this event together. Let's all help out our new President Larry Lufkin in the coming year and volunteer your services. We are a growing outfit and one worth donations of your time or dollars. Murry—your presentation at the Memorial service was felt in the heart and I wish you peace and comfort in your time of great loss.

—Ron Stoleson ([RMStoleson@aol.com](mailto:RMStoleson@aol.com))

As a high school teacher and former smokejumper (MYL 1988-98), I'd like to apologize on behalf of teachers everywhere for the terrible spelling found in these comments by all the 16 year olds wanting to be jumpers. They'll probably all end up in Grangeville.

—Chris Schow ([schow47@yahoo.com](mailto:schow47@yahoo.com))

Wow! I just finished reading Murry Taylor's new book *Jumping Fire*. It's a definite "must read" for any woman who loves a smoke-jumper!

—PK ([sbpk61@hotmail.com](mailto:sbpk61@hotmail.com))

I was interested in finding out if anyone has seen or knows where Ray Skank is currently. He jumped from around 1950 to at least the mid-'70s out of HQ, is a Furnhopper from Oregon State University (I believe??).

—Lou Harvey ([ljharvey@pacbell.net](mailto:ljharvey@pacbell.net))

Great site; I check it regularly to see if anyone I jumped with has written in. Since I stopped jumping, I have gotten weaker and fatter, a bad combination. I'm now a deputy prosecutor in Nez Perce County, Lewiston, moving towards my dream of practicing Jumper Law: Divorces, DUIs, and assorted misdemeanors. Phil Monsanto, I saw your post, but there's something wrong with your e-mail address. Hope the jumpers have a great season and someone makes more OTs than Wally, and Nemore gets back on the list.

—Sunil Ramalingam ([SunilR@co.nezperce.id.us](mailto:SunilR@co.nezperce.id.us))

I am the daughter of a former Fairbanks jumper, Tom Crane. My dad jumped from the early to late '60s and continued to work in fire mgmt. until his death in 1987. At that time he was at the Oregon State Office (BLM). Reading all of your entries reminds me of how much I miss the smell of his clothes after a fire, or the sound of aircraft and helicopters coming in. But most of all I miss the stories. If any of you remember my dad I would sure love to hear from you. I'd especially love to get my hands on some old photographs of the "good ole days". As he always said in his closings, "Keep the faith."

Hope to hear from someone soon.

—Colleen (Crane) Hawley ([cahawley@vale.k12.or.us](mailto:cahawley@vale.k12.or.us))

I only jumped two summers ('95 and '96) out of NCSB, and went on to pursue other things. I tell you, there is not a day where I think about the job and wonder if I made the right decision to quit after only two years. Just heard the Murry Taylor interview on NPR from the Dominican Republic, and I have to agree with the things he said. I do miss being at the door, adrenaline pumping, the smell of smoke and the feel of heat from 1500 feet, and most of all the one minute of loneliness as you drift from one element to another. Hope the 2000 fire season is "good" for you all. I'm hoping to give jumping one more shot in 2001 before going back to school. We'll see. UH HUH!!!

—Philip Monsanto ([pmonsant@juno.com](mailto:pmonsant@juno.com))

That is great that you are trying to provide extra benefits through a club, but we are still trying to get the basic necessities of life here. You want to help the cause write a congressman. Tell them that we are a neglected group that is being denied the basics for living in today's world. We need Healthcare and a retirement plan that is government sponsored. We need a guarantee of employment and a title change to Forest Fire Fighter and not seasonal or temporary or forestry technician. How many more fire fighters are going to die without these basic necessities? Join the FFFRM and help fight!!!!

—hoffa ([hoffaffrm@hotmail.com](mailto:hoffaffrm@hotmail.com))

I remember the Alaska Big Flip in '86! Memories of the party afterward aren't quite as vivid, though I do remember someone assaulting the lawn ornaments with a wiffle ball bat, and a heated argument with some R-6 guys about which direction really was north. All proceeds from the flip were generously donated to "Reflections," a local home for wayward women. You just don't see that kind of community spirit anymore!

—Jo Jo Jumper ([btm132@psu.edu](mailto:btm132@psu.edu))

Who is this character named hoffa? He needs to shut up.

—Bob ([happy@hotmail.com](mailto:happy@hotmail.com))

Hello and welcome to the arena. My organization is called the FFFRM which stands for the Forest FireFighter's Reform Movement. Our goal is to fight for the common forest firefighter throughout the U.S. and the world. To tell the ones that are in charge what the real deal is. Membership is simple, just write to the media and government and voice your opinion. This in turn will let the ones at the top know what needs changing. Your quality of life is important to the FFFRM. That is why most of the themes of the FFFRM are about increasing your quality of life. Give me an email and the problem will be talked about. For starters the organization wants the title changed from Forestry Technician to Forest Fire Fighter. Next we want the term seasonal to be abolished and everyone should be made 13/13s. Everyone that uses a tool and fights fire needs a retirement plan, healthcare, and a guarantee of a job. Remember that if you don't like what's going on do something about it!

—hoffa ([hoffaffrm@hotmail.com](mailto:hoffaffrm@hotmail.com))

Hey this is cool, I was able to find my dad's name in the registry of past smokejumpers. I am following in his footsteps, this will be my third year of fire. Be looking out for me in the next few years!

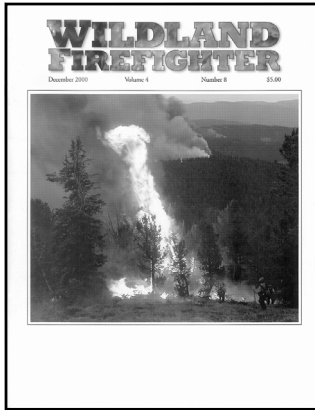
—Micaela M. Young ([rasende@boisestate.com](mailto:rasende@boisestate.com))

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# The Federal Firefighter Gold Rush of 2001

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*The following article is printed from the Wildland Firefighter magazine with permission of editor Brian Ballou.*



by Brian Ballou

There's a hiring bonanza going on—and it's driving people crazy. On one side, firefighters and firefighter wannabes have a wide and varied menu to choose from in their job search endeavors this winter. On the other side, fire managers are deluged with applications and inquiries—and the paperwork and headaches associated with adding new

personnel. Ideally, when the madness subsides sometime this spring, the nation should be flush with willing and able bodies for the 2001 fire season.

However, the federal agencies have been down this road before, and a lot of people doing the hiring this year are doing so with some big question marks hanging over their heads.

One question is: How long will the money last? The money is here today, but will it be there next year? Two years from now?

Federal funding is a fragile thing, and fire managers have always been bottom feeders when it comes to budget allotments. A new president can take the money away. So can a new Congress. All it takes is one fireless fire season.

In the mid-'70s, Congress laid a golden egg that enabled the Forest Service to hire hundreds of firefighters for new Inter-Regional hotshot and Regional Reinforcement crews. This was wonderful. People stuck in dead-end jobs at low GS grades were able to move to friendlier districts and in many cases—upgrade their pay. Scads of new employees got jobs on engines and brush disposal crews.

Quite a few people who had been seasonal smokejumpers and hotshots for several years got promotions to full-time supervisory positions.

When the 1975 fire season opened for business, there were all kinds of bodies to throw onto the lines. It was a busy year, everyone traveled a lot, and outside of a wrecked Amtrak car or two—it was a good year and the expansion seemed justified.

Then 1976 hit. It was a dead year. People's bar bills exceeded their paychecks. If the Lake States hadn't thrown a huge peat bog fire and invited everyone, the fire season would have been a complete dud. But it was enough of a dud to slash the federal fire budget, putting the Regional Reinforcement crews into permanent retirement. The mid-'70s hiring bonanza was over.

Naturally, people doing today's hiring, and who remember the '70s debacle, are wondering whether today's new hires will be tomorrow's layoffs. Unfortunately, there is no way to accurately predict the future. But history says not to count on continued support from Congress.

Another question is: Will more firefighters actually result in fewer or smaller fires?

The '70s hiring boom had been an interesting experiment in wildland fire fighting economics. A huge infusion of money artificially inflated the federal fire fighting workforce to meet federal fire demands at the top end of the scale; a lot of reason for the mid-'70s fire budget expansion was due to a string of bad fire seasons in the Pacific Northwest, which burned a lot of merchantable timber. The concept of creating a larger militia to handle bad fire seasons seemed a good idea. More firefighters: fewer fires. At least this was the theory.

It seems like a lot of the same thinking is at work today. Ever since 1987, there have been quite a few fire seasons that burned vast numbers of acres. At the same time, the federal fire fighting workforce has been shrinking. Clearly, there has been a need to add more bodies.

But there are differences between the national wildland fire picture in the 1970s and today. Time has proven that aggressive suppression doesn't necessarily result in better long-term wildland fire protection. Enlightened fire management tells us that making wildland areas more receptive to low-intensity fire and less vulnerable to high-intensity fire is the way to achieve national peace with fire. Given that there are millions of acres of wildland needing fuel modification, it seems prudent to beef up the fuels management side of the workforce rather than the suppression side. At least, it makes sense to blend suppression and fuels management more than ever before.

For this reason, it is a good plan to beef up the federal Type I fire-fighting workforce. Hotshot crews and smokejumpers are usually in short supply during busy fire seasons. Having more of them will make it easier to meet demands in upcoming seasons. And there is the added benefit that organized crews make great prescribed burning crews. When there aren't fires for them, there will likely be pre-

scribed fire projects that need to be done. Local districts will benefit from being able to acquire a mobile, trained and physically fit workforce, and the crews will benefit from the training experience and exposure to fire.

Therefore, more firefighters will be better—if they're trained to be more than just firefighters.

But another question nagging federal employers today is: Will there be enough qualified candidates to fill all the jobs?

Probably not, especially under the current situation where the federal fire jobs being offered aren't competitive with jobs in other markets. In the '80s and '90s, people frustrated with seasonal firefighter employment looked elsewhere for employers who offered more job security, better wages, and competitive benefits. People bent on following the career firefighter track looked to city, county and state agencies, where job security and benefits were often greater. In places like Southern California, a person with a few years of hotshot or engine experience could compete for some pretty sweet jobs. But there were also a lot of sweet jobs in

nonfire job markets, too. More, in fact. During the last 15 years, a lot of people who really would have liked to be fighting fire wound up applying for jobs in other employment sectors. A lot of good firefighters traded in their yellow collars for white ones.

To recapture job market parity, federal agencies would be prudent to make hotshot and smokejumper jobs "real jobs." Drop the seasonal employee thing. Turn all Type I firefighters into full-time, year round, better paid employees with real-time benefits and security. This is the only way that the agencies will realize dividends from increased investments in training, equipment and facilities.

The biggest challenge facing fire managers during this hiring frenzy will be to not repeat mistakes from previous frenzies. By staffing to meet needs brought by changes in fire management, and by becoming a competitive employer, the increase in federal fire spending should make a truly stronger federal fire management work force, and reduce resource and property losses from wildfire. 📌

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## Featured Life Members

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### GEORGE CROSS

George Cross (MSO '74) is another life member that we would like to thank for his support. George's support goes back to the beginning of the NSA as he is a charter member of our organization and is one of many whose early support made a big difference.

As a smokejumper, George is a bit of a legend because he was crazy enough to go through Rookie training at the ripe age of 47. If you think that is something get this—he finished his last season of jumping at the spry age of 62! There are plenty of 21 year olds from the class of '74 whose main memory was seeing nothing more than George's backside during runs and packouts. Prior to jumping he spent 11 seasons on the Nine Mile IR crew, which was more than adequate preparation for his jumping career.

While George's summers were spent filled with adventure as a smokejumper and hotshot, the rest of the year his energy was focused on building a distinguished academic career at the University of Montana. He served as a professor of health and physical education from 1951 through 1981. From 1965 through 1970 he held the prestigious position of dean of

students at the university. He retired in 1981 and now spends most of his time in Lenore, Idaho.

In retirement George has maintained his status as a modern day renaissance man. He is still a physical animal as he competes in the Senior Olympics at the state and regional levels, but he also finds time to foster his creative side by pursuing his passion for sculpting. George is an example of what we can all be as we move along in life. Keep going, George. You inspire us all. 📌

### JAMES MURPHY

The NSA would like to welcome James Murphy (MSO '48) into the special group of supporters who have joined the Life Membership Club. James felt the last tug of an opening parachute in 1950 after spending three rewarding summers jumping out of Missoula. Like most of us, his time with the jumpers played a significant role in his early development and gave him many great memories.

After earning his B.A. from the University of Montana in 1951 he joined the Air Force where he served on active duty for two years. He

enjoyed his stint so much that he remained a member of the reserves until 1981 where he retired with the rank of colonel. One of the accomplishments James is most proud of during his military service is the fact that during his last 13 years of his career he served as a liaison officer for the Air Force Academy.

While James found much success as a reservist, many of his greatest achievements occurred in the private sector where he was a partner in the national accounting firm of Grant Thornton. His professional accomplishments within the firm are too numerous to mention. In addition to his responsibilities as a partner in a major accounting firm he also found time to serve in various executive capacities in several civic organizations.

At 71 James is still going strong. He gets out and chases the little white ball around the course about a 120 times a year. When the snow shows up in Reno he packs the clubs away and pulls out the shotgun and skis. He is able to hunt ducks at least 25 days a year and he gets out and skis the great resorts of Tahoe a couple of days a week on top of his other activities. The NSA thanks James for his continued support. 📌

# Jack Mathews Had 27-Year Career with the CIA

by Starr Jenkins (Cave Junction '48)

We are sorry to report that Jack Mathews, a Missoula jumper, 1948-1951, passed away on January 8, 2001, at his home in Santa Barbara, CA, at age 71. Though he suffered much over the last two years from diverticulitis, the cause of his death has not yet been announced.

Friends and relatives from as far away as Hawaii and Montana assembled in Santa Barbara for a memorial service for him on January 14. Jack was born in 1929 in Havre, Montana, and attended the University of Montana in Missoula during his jumper years.

After graduation he signed up for duty with the CIA which was then recruiting jumpers. During his 27-year career Jack worked on many Cold War assignments in Africa, Latin America, Southeast Asia and Taiwan in our nation's undercover battles to prevent the Soviet Union from taking over the world.

His work in Taiwan included a late Korean War secret operation allowing Chiang Kai Shek's forces to assault a Chinese-held island near the North Korean border—with a parachute regiment leading the two-division invasion. Jack Mathews was the only American jumping in with the Nationalist Chinese paratroops, and he survived despite huge casualties among the Nationalist attackers. The attack was repulsed by the Red Chinese, but since it showed that the U.S. was ready to back an increase in the war if they didn't settle, it did achieve a quick end to the Korean War two weeks later, after the Communists had been stalling for a year in the negotiations at Pan Mun Jom. For this service Jack Mathews received a medal for valor from General Chiang Kai Shek—all of which was secret until after the Soviet Union fell 36 years later.

Jack is remembered for his considerable writing, his jumping, his wilderness hikes and his service to America. He even made a free fall jump in 1986. His oldest son was born on August 5, the anniversary of the Mann Gulch Fire, so Jack persuaded his wife to name the boy Philip William Mathews to

honor his two friends who had died in that disaster, Phil McVey and Bill Hellman. Any jumpers who want to express their thoughts on Jack to Phil may write him at 57 Arizona Memorial Drive, #115, Honolulu, HI 96818. 📧

## Can You Help Us Locate Mel?



(official U.S. Navy photograph)

**Mel Greenup** (Cave Junction '53), team leader of the U.S. Navy's Chuting Stars, is shown above in a 1961 proficiency jump. Mel is on NSA's "missing" list. Can you help us locate him? 📧



*Smokejumper*  
10 Judy Lane  
Chico, CA 95926

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Permit 119

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