

SMOKEJUMPER



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NSA Web site: <http://www.smokejumpers.com>

Managing Editor: *Chuck Sheley*

Associate Editor: *Ed Booth*

Editing: *K. G. Sheley*

Photos: *Johnny Kirkley*

Illustrators: *Dan Veenendaal*, and *Eric Rajala*

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Check the NSA website



Message from the President



by **John Twiss**
(Redmond '67)
PRESIDENT

I AM ESCAPING the cold season of the Dakotas this year by wintering in Arizona not far from Marana, where I used to attend Forest Service fire training at the Pinal Air Park. Short-sleeve weather and lots of Border Patrol!

Board member **Tom Boatner** (FBX-80) recently put a fact sheet together about the National Smokejumper Association that I would like to share with you:

The NSA's mission is dedicated to preserving the history and lore of smokejumping, maintaining and restoring our nation's forest and grassland resources, responding to special needs of smokejumpers and their families, and advocating for the programs evolution.

The NSA's values are comradeship, education, pride in work well-done and loyalty. The NSA implements its mission through a series of programs:

- The NSA Good Samaritan Fund is established to give financial support to current and former smokejumpers and their families in a time of need.
- The NSA Scholarship Pro-

gram will provide scholarships annually to active smokejumpers or family members pursuing education at college or trade schools.

- The NSA Art Jukkala Scholarship Program provides an annual award to children of smokejumpers killed in the line of duty.

- The NSA Trail Maintenance Chair Scholarship provides an annual scholarship to a smokejumper or child of a smokejumper who attends forestry school at the University of Montana.

- The Smokejumper History Program documents and preserves the history of smokejumping in part by doing video interviews of early smokejumpers (more than 250 to date) and storing photographs, historical documents and equipment (archived at the University of Montana's Mansfield Library), and displaying smokejumper artifacts in key places.

- The NSA magazine and website contains articles, stories, photos of all aspects of smokejumping. Updates from all jump bases, current events, reunion information, endeavors of active and inactive smokejumpers and obituaries can be found in both forums. The high-quality publication is read widely.

- The NSA Trails Program completed its 11th season in 2010 with more than 1,000 miles of trails maintained and numerous backcountry structures restored. The program operates in eight states from the High Sierras in California to the Boundary Waters in Minnesota. Several hundred annual volunteers par-

ticipate, and demand for the smokejumpers increases each year.

- **Involvement with current fire management and smokejumper programs** with both the BLM and the Forest Service leadership helps spot opportunities to provide support and allows the NSA to stay up-to-date with current issues and smokejumper utilization.

Maintaining connections with smokejumper leadership greatly increases the NSA's awareness. Since 2003, \$125,000 of your financial contributions has been distributed from the Good Samaritan and scholarship funds to smokejumpers and their families.

Roughly 5,000 men and women have been smokejumpers. Approximately 3,500 of you are still alive. There are 1,710 NSA members, of whom 251 are life members.

You are a generous, loyal bunch that I am proud to be associated with. Stay warm this winter or come on down for a visit. 🐻

NSA Members — Save This Information

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

Smokejumper magazine

Articles, obits, change of address

Chuck Sheley 530-893-0436
cnkgshaley@earthlink.net
10 Judy Ln.
Chico, CA 95926

Membership

John McDaniel 785-668-2093
jumpercj57@hotmail.com
P.O. Box 105
Falun, KS 67442-0105

All else

NSA President
John Twiss 605-673-4117
johntwiss1@live.com
160 Clay Street
Custer, SD 57730-1036

Smokejumper base abbreviations:

Anchorage.....ANC	Grangeville GAC	MissoulaMSO
BoiseNIFC	Idaho City IDC	ReddingRDD
Cave Junction CJ	La Grande..... LGD	Redmond.....RAC
Fairbanks FBX	McCall.....MYC	West Yellowstone WYS
		Winthrop..... NCSB

Elections for NSA Board of Directors

Chuck Sheley

Election Committee Chair

The Board of Directors is the governing body of the NSA and meets two times a year to conduct NSA business. The meetings are held at various places in the Pacific Northwest. The terms of four members of the BOD will expire July 1, 2011.

Even though you would be obligated to two meetings a year, it is important to remember that you can be a valuable working BOD member regardless of where you live. In the day of email, a functioning board can work with its members spread across the U.S. If you have ideas and are willing to roll up your sleeves, please consider joining the NSA work force.

Election timeline and procedures:

January - February 15, fill out personal information sheet. Must be in my hands by Feb. 15.

2. Personal information on each candidate inserted into the April issue of *Smokejumper*.

3. Ballot sheet inserted into the April issue of *Smokejumper*.

4. Ballots must be received by May 20.

5. New board members to take office July, election results published in the October issue of *Smokejumper*.

Please call, write or email for your filing papers. My contact information is on left column of this page. The time to act is now!

Hope, The Best Tool

by LeRoy Cook (Cave Junction '64)

Awake with high anxiety, my mind was spinning. Inexperience got me here, and now which way to turn?

Last night had been full of powerful visions and dreams as I lay in a sea of shadows. Night alone in the tall uncut can be lonely if you're lost – worst if you don't have control of your thoughts. Yesterday, darkness came like a clipper across windy seas, forcing me to stop, tired, wrapping in the orange and white cocoon to siwash for the night.

Nights are cold this high up in the Cascades. I had weathered the struggle to stay warm, falling asleep only to wake often to shiver and at times listen to the phantom calls of the night dogs.

High up against the bright stars, tall trees formed a tattered and torn broken veil all around. The parachute, now wet with the dew of dawn, held little heat. Anticipating the coming light, I thought, "What to do this morning?"

On top of the hill where I stopped at dusk, water was available, but you had to go down over the side into the canyon bottom. The small stream would be clear, cold and so inviting; it, like all small streams, luridly called. No food for a couple of days and little water add to the way your mind works.

"It would be a hard climb out," my thoughts; I was awake, tired, filled with icy doubt, and feeling too drained to go for water!

A few days ago I sat in the door as long, sweeping passes were made behind a squall line of towering thunderheads. A thousand feet below, the green forest ran past, away and away, forming an unbroken, solid mass while the wind outside the Twin Beech raced by.

I scanned the woods below looking for smoke in the forest canopy – burning snags set afire by the Lightning Gods. The two Pratt and Whitney recipes sped us along over highlands as the ever-changing panorama slid past.

Moist, unstable air shook us as we trailed a massed line of storms marching across southwest Oregon. A bumpy ride, the Twin banked hard in the azure sky as primrose lightning cut anvil walls of ever-changing cumulonimbus. Below, dead snags stuck up everywhere you looked: like watchtowers, easy targets; like magic, a burning one appeared; and so it began.

The timber jump had been somewhere in the high and rugged cascading spine that crosses the state north to south and named after the rapids in the Columbia River



LeRoy Cook (Courtesy J.Kirkley)

gorge. Flyover country. I was up on a mountain in a dark and ancient woodland called "Umpqua," and somewhere in the distance far away was the Siskiyou trail now called "Interstate 5" by those who love commerce and growth.

Around me everywhere, brooding and watchful old-growth evergreens were my only companions. The Umpqua Forest, part of the western slope of the Oregon Cascades, was covered with colossal giants – fir and hemlock were my world.

This was a while ago when youth was my ally, inexperience my companion. School would again be in session today, but all of life's lessons are not taught in buildings. Sometimes there's no joy in anticipation, "having fun today," I thought! Life's simple secrets can often hide in the tall grass or the shadows of quiet pools – pretty places where nature's tests come before her lessons.

I went to Oregon before the great migration to self-centeredness – a time when pickup trucks still had one seat and were made by men in Detroit from pig iron. You were judged by what you did, not what you looked like. Parts of the West were still shiny green, since the

rapine of the old growth was not complete; unbounded and everlasting, now so long ago and far away.

The state's beauty made folks identify with a vast and slumbering, unbroken solitude. Here the ancients believed the region's tall mountains were bridges to the gods; beyond their beauty was wisdom in the silence of high places. Mythical legends lived here, like Sasquatch, and trees were king.

My day had come pregnant with concern – needing to get out, to find my way, but what to do? I felt defeated at having become lost. When you are young, it's hard to not compare yourself to those around you. Doubting thoughts can be a kiss of death, a trail not to go down. Lost, I was now not living up to what was expected, and I thought I would probably be fired when I got out – if I got out. Unchecked thoughts had taken me where I shouldn't have gone.

But morning's gift and promise had come, as it does each day; the last of the night winds whispered "Luck be with you," and my new day began. At first it was just a will-o'-the-wisp that drifted beyond wishful thinking. Soon a faint noise wafted through the canopy, and I heard the low whine of engines as they carried clearly in the still, morning air.

"It's the Beech," I thought. "They're looking for me. *Build a fire!*"

The polished veneer of civilization was not far away. As the fellow smokejumper landed near me, I can still hear that internal switch flipping in my brain. A conscious awareness came in less than a second, going from down to up.

Suddenly everything was all right; I stood still as a windless sea and thought, "Why had I been so negative?" There had been nothing wrong with me physically. "I could have gone on for days!"

It's not important for you to know how I got in this situation; think something up if you must. Anyone can get lost – in fact, many are lost today, and no amount of electronic wizardry will help them find their way. People don't have to be in the woods to get lost, but many will lose their way in today's false satisfaction of instant gratification and greed.

I'm not one to preach and it's with reservation that I write this, for it's an unmanly act to talk about yourself, but there's something about living, change, and these harder economic times. Like that time in Umpqua, we are still okay.

One time through is all we get down the river. You can't go back and fish it a second time. Life can take us all at a moment's notice to places requiring an enduring tolerance. Your thoughts are as real as the food you put in your belly and the car you drive. Getting your mind right is the fuel behind action and power, the source for

how you deal with stress and live every day.

It's the same with faith and religion – thoughts are energy, either tools of destruction or hope.

The wisdom of many years can't be wrong. You get more out of life by looking outward rather than inward, having a sense of direction. We all do better when we believe in ourselves and others. You can find someone who's lost, but you can't save a troubled soul; only God can do that.

The world can be such a lonely place for some, especially during the holidays. They may be far from family and friends with no one to turn to; love may have been tarnished or lost. Acts of kindness bring hope and put color back in people. This year, our Christmas may be a little brighter if we all reach out and help someone with need, for everyone has to be somewhere, even if it is Christmas. ♣

Thanks To The Good Samaritan Fund

by Scott Anderson (McCall '84)

Last Fall I was diagnosed with Acute Myeloid Leukemia for the second time. I am writing this letter to show my sincere gratitude for the help my family and I received from the *NSA Good Samaritan Fund*. I am pleased to report, that there are no signs of Leukemia left in my body. I expect a full recovery.

Our successful fight against Leukemia required several important elements; most of which are contained within the community in which we live and the friends we have surrounded ourselves with. Health insurance and western medicine simply aren't enough. Treatments like mine require that you and your family walk away from life as you know it and embrace the unknown. We are so fortunate that we had a solid support system, which you were a part of, that didn't allow everything we have worked so hard for to fall to pieces.

For some, the lack of support requires them to rebuild not only their bodies, but also their lives. One is difficult enough, both can be insurmountable. In the beginning we were reluctant to ask for or take help. We quickly realized just how fortunate we were to have the assistance we did.

We would like to express our profound gratitude for your help and generosity, while we went through this challenging time.

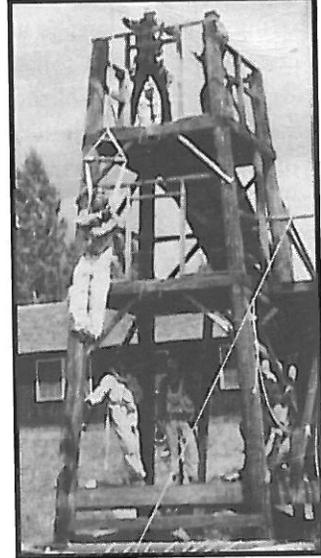
—Scott, Sandie, Eva & Jing Jing Anderson



James Browne (MSO-49)



Leonard Piper (MSO-49)



9-Mile Jump Tower

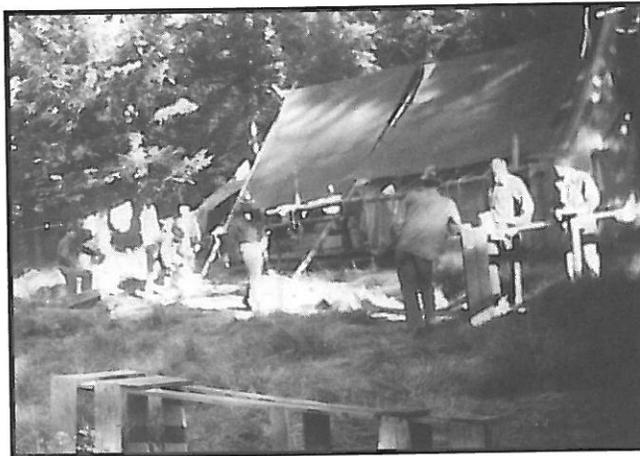


Missoula Rookies 1949

Photo's Courtesy George Harpole Collection



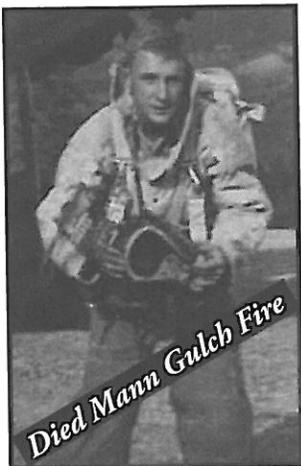
James Clinkingbeard (MSO-49)



Smokejumper Brush Camp



Robert Bennett (MSO-49)



Hank Thol (MSO-49)



Bill Henry (MSO-49), Howard Gorsuch (MYC-46) & Bill Risken (MSO-49)

Layout Design: Johnny Kirkley (CJ-64)



George Harpole (MSO-49)

From The Smokejumpers Into The Forest Products Laboratory

by George B. Harpole (Missoula '49)

I visited the USDA Forest Service's Forest Products Laboratory (FPL) in Madison, Wis., Nov. 25, 2009 – the day before Thanksgiving.

I left the FPL almost 20 years ago to retire in Colorado. The surroundings of the FPL had changed. The garden areas in front of the FPL were gone and there were new buildings everywhere. Only the front of the Forest Products Laboratory looked the same.

In July 1974 I transferred to the FPL from the Forest Service's Pacific Southwest Forest and Range Experiment Station in Berkeley, Calif. As a forest products utilization economist, my job was to assess the accomplishments and commercial potentials for products and processing concepts being developed at the Forest Products Laboratory.

The assignment was much like the Marketing and New Business assignments I had when formerly working for Potlatch Forest (1959-67). To my delight, I found some big winners in the research programs at the FPL – for example, veneer-laminated beams and lumber, best opening-face sawing (computerized sawing techniques), and flakeboard sheathing (better known today as OSB sheathing).

Now, upon entering the FPL, I met Sandy Morgan at the receptionist's desk. She recognized my name! I was flattered because somebody I hadn't met before recognized me by name. She said she spent several years in Information Services at the FPL and had seen my name there.

Suddenly, my long-ago friend Bill Ireland seemed to come out of nowhere. We had to catch up on where I've been and why I was there, etc. In our conversation Bill mentioned the news that **Earl Cooley** (MSO-40), smokejumping pioneer and longtime base superintendent at Missoula, had passed away Nov. 9 at the age of 98.

Earl's passing was posted in every major newspaper in the U.S., as well as many foreign newspapers. He and **Rufus Robinson** (MSO-40) were the first two Forest Service smokejumpers to be dispatched by parachute into a forested area to put a fire out – back in 1940. They were on the fire to which they were dispatched within the hour, but had a 28-mile hike back to civilization.

I knew Earl Cooley. I was one of his smokejumpers during the fire seasons of 1949, 1950 and 1952. This was back in those days when being a fire guard or smokejumper was one of the stepping stones the Forest Service offered young people trying to scrape a few summertime dollars together to pursue college educations – to obtain degrees in forestry, journalism, economics, teaching and other professional pursuits. This was a time before student loans. For me, smokejumping was a stepping stone that eventually led to my employment at the U.S. Forest Service's Forest Products Laboratory.

I've always had a high regard for Earl Cooley, who always remembered us by our last names. Earl will be missed, but will be well-remembered. His name is certain to be a historical marker for the smokejumping culture – as a tribute to his character, courage and leadership in the face of doubters and naysayers. For example: *"I will remind you that you wrote some time ago about J.B. Bruce's scheme of dropping men from airplanes for firefighting. I am willing to take a chance on most any kind of a proposition that promises better action on fires, but I hesitate very much to go into the kind of thing that Bruce proposes. In the first place, the best information I can get from experienced fliers is that all parachute jumpers are more or less crazy – just a little bit unbalanced, otherwise they wouldn't be engaged in such a hazardous undertaking."*

– Regional Forester Evan Kelley, July 1935

Earl Cooley wrote a 204-page autobiography, *Trimotor and Trail*, that is now a collector's book. Hardbound, signed copies of his book can be bought from the Forest Service Museum's gift shop for \$30, plus shipping. Visit the website at www.nmfs-history.net.

Earl's book is also offered from other sources via the Internet for as much as \$500 per copy. The Forest Service Museum offers Earl's book at a bargain price with the proceeds helping to support the National Museum of Forest Service History in Missoula.

Bill Ireland was aware I had been a smokejumper and suggested I write a blog for "Chips" regarding this part of my Forest Service career. I agreed I would try to put something together and send it to him.

After talking to Bill I was able to join a staff meet-



George & Vicki Harpole (Courtesy G. Harpole)

ing being held by long-ago friend and RWU-4851 Project Leader Ken Skog. The meeting included FPL old-timers Cheryl Hatfield, Peter Ince, Jim Howard, Ted Bilek and Henry Spelter. Dave McKeever started his Thanksgiving a day early, so wasn't there, and Cheryl told me I missed crossing paths with Bob Stone (a former project leader) by only a few days. I was sorry to have missed these guys.

The staff meeting revealed how much the FPL had changed, especially with respect to reductions in research programs related to solid wood products, with new research programs moving into areas of engineered structures, composite-type products, wood durability, wood protection research and remote sensing (Google Earth-kind of resource watching).

In fact, the 90,000-square-foot structure being built in front of the FPL was dedicated in June as the FPL's new "Centennial Research Facility," where these newer research programs will operate. The "Centennial" name celebrates the 100th year of the Forest Service's existence and Gifford Pinchot's declaration of the Forest Service's commitment to conservation – "To manage our National Forest in a way to create the greatest good for the greatest number."

After the staff meeting, Peter Ince escorted me to short visits with John Zerbe and Sue Austin. We looked for Regis Miller, but he was missing from his wood anatomy domain. Suddenly the dim light and smell of the FPL's hallways brought back the ghosts of everyone I ever knew at the FPL – like they should be there, but just weren't there now. I thought I could hear Norma Jones calling out for George McSwain, and Jerry Lipski's laughter coming from somewhere down on the second floor. On leaving the FPL I began thinking I must be slipping, but after all I'll be 80

years old this year.

Then, on the 1,200-mile drive back from Madison to Grand Junction, Colo., those ghosts from the FPL emerged from the fog along the roadway, saying they wanted to know what I was going to say about being a smokejumper. Gradually those I came to know during my days as a smokejumper replaced them. The long drive created a hypnotic experience – generating a consortium of haunting memories coming back to tell me what I should write for Bill Ireland about being a smokejumper.

What could I say? What would my comrades of long ago want me to say?

Actually, what I could say about being a smokejumper during the 1949-52 fire seasons in Region 1 is best described by my friend Starr Jenkins (CJ-48) in a book he wrote, *Smokejumpers, '49 – Brothers in the Sky*. You could say we were Earl Cooley's boys. Copies of Starr's book (220 pages, plus a collection of professionally taken photos) are available on Amazon.com – at over \$70 for collector-grade copies, or new, signed copies from Starr Jenkins for \$35 – postage included – while copies last. Write Starr at 285 Buena Vista Ave., San Luis Obispo, CA 93405.

Rumbling west on Interstate 80 and then on I-76 toward Denver, the voices from my ghostly companions came through increasingly clear. Yes, there was lots of fun and bravado being a smokejumper. However, being on the early end of the learning curve for the smokejumper organization, we were taught all the tricks and techniques about making parachute jumps into timber and high-altitude pastures to quickly put small fires out.

But, we were not taught fire safety with respect to large fires, or for small fires that might explode into becoming large fires. During our last classroom session, while training at Camp Menard outside of Missoula, I asked our instructor two questions.

"What about the use of backfires?" I asked.

He replied, "We don't use them. They're just used on large fires."

My second question: "What can you do if you see you're going to hit a snag when coming in for a landing?"

He smiled when he replied, "It's gonna hurt."

I admit my second question might have sounded stupid, as well as a bit fearful, but, what if Wag Dodge (MSO-41) had been there to answer the first question? Wag Dodge used a backfire to save his life at Mann Gulch. Could his response in the classroom have saved the lives of the 13 other firefighters who died at Mann Gulch?

There were 12 smokejumpers plus a fire guard –

James Harrison (MSO-47) – who walked to the fire. Two of those Mann Gulch victims were my close friends – **Leonard Piper** (MSO-49) and **Bob Bennett** (MSO-49) – who sat next to me when I asked the stupid (?) questions at our last classroom training session.

Being rebuffed on the backfire issue, I discussed this with Leonard and Bob in an effort to vindicate myself after the session. Obviously, nothing I said prevailed and might not have for me either if I had been there at Mann Gulch. Hence, there are 12 crosses on the hillside of Mann Gulch, plus a Star of David for one of our smokejumper brothers. Starr Jenkins' book describes the Mann Gulch tragedy in detail.

Then there was the Yellowstone Fire of 1988 (794,000 acres), smaller than Region 1's fire of 1910 (3.2 million acres), but with 9,000 firefighters and 4,000 U.S. military personnel without losing a single firefighter, although there were two related non-fire-fighter deaths.

Yes! We can thereby be proud that we know how to practice fire safety. But the Yellowstone Fire did contribute enormous volumes of greenhouse gases to the atmosphere and surely affected subsequent weather patterns – pointing to the environmental importance of the expedient suppression of small fires as is done by smokejumpers.

But, as if we needed another reminder, there were 14 more firefighters (10 men and four women) who lost their lives in Colorado's Storm King Fire on July 6, 1994 – another two-man fire that exploded into becoming a large fire in the warm afternoon when the fire danger was at an upper limit, like the Mann Gulch fire of Aug. 5, 1949.

Twenty-five other firefighters died in association with wildland fires in 1994, although most were related to accidents and failures of firefighting vehicles, aircraft and firefighting equipment.

So, the message, as told to me by my ghostly advisors, is to tell you that forest fires are deadly, and that the suppression of small fires is of paramount safety and environmental importance as done by the Forest Service's and Bureau of Land Management's smoke-jumper units. They are telling me to tell you to stay out of any forest that has a high level of fire danger, or to be sure you have a plan for your escape from a fiery death – like keeping close to a lake, river, bio-free area, or have a surefire highway escape for you and your vehicle.

My brother, Myron Harpole, was fighting a fire in Yellowstone in 1946 that overran him and his firefighting partner. They survived by wading into the mucky waters of a small lake while a firestorm ran over them. They emerged with cinder-burned shirts and skin.

Since then, brother Myron served in the Korean War, has had a family and a successful professional career.

James Harrison, who died at Mann Gulch, was a friend of my brother. Thus, the voices of my smoke-jumper comrades emphasized what I must tell you, for safety's sake: first, be informed; second, anticipate; and third, minimize your risk. These voices are saying this is what "safety first" is all about – whether you're in the forest as a smokejumper or visitor, or you get carried away with skate sailing on the Madison-area lakes, riding motorcycles, sports parachuting, snorkeling coral reefs, rafting rapids on Colorado rivers, having a siege of road-rage or just having fun.

I know one of those voices belongs to Earl Cooley. 🙏

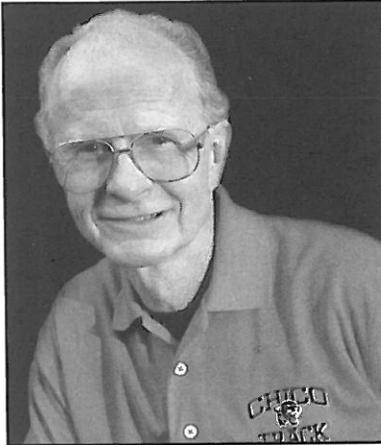
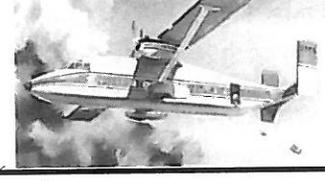
New NSA Life Members since January 2010

Thanks for your support!

#	Name	Base	Year
231	JIM DIEDERICH	REDDING	1970
232	KIM MAYNARD	MISSOULA	1982
233	TOM BOATNER	FAIRBANKS	1980
234	GLENN HALE	MCCALL	1957
235	GUY HURLBUTT	IDAHO CITY	1962
236	ALEX THEIOS	CAVE JUNCTION	1965
237	ROY BELLI	CAVE JUNCTION	1951
238	JACK HELLE	MCCALL	1954
239	WAYNE SCHRUNK	CAVE JUNCTION	1957
240	GARY JOHNSON	REDDING	1969
241	PETE LANDIS	CAVE JUNCTION	1962
242	RON THORESON	CAVE JUNCTION	1960
243	RICHARD BURNS	FAIRBANKS	1964
244	BOB "RIGGER" SNYDER	CAVE JUNCTION	1948
245	DAVID OSWALT	CAVE JUNCTION	1968
246	ROY KORKALO	MISSOULA	1961
247	RONALD BORST	NO. CASCADES	1964
248	DOUG MCCOY	REDDING	1973
249	DOUG WAMSLEY	MISSOULA	1965
250	GENE DEBRUIN	MISSOULA	1959



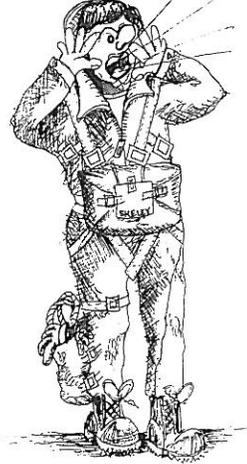
Sounding Off from the Editor



by Chuck Sheley
(Cave Junction '59)
MANAGING EDITOR

DURING THE SEVENTEEN years that I ran the Type II Crew Program for the Mendocino N.F., I felt that there was a greater benefit to our country than just helping control forest fires. As smokejumpers you might wonder what could be more important? My answer: Establishing a work ethic in young people and having them experience situations where they are hungry, very thirsty, dirty, tired and, in many cases, pushed to their physical limits. We had a very physical training program for the 3500+ firefighters that we trained and put into the field during those years. Many of these individuals continued in the fire service. Twenty-two of them became smokejumpers, and I still see some familiar names in the "Touching All Bases" reports. Coming off an NSA Trails Project in 2009, I dropped off Fire Captain **Jeff Steffens'** (BOI-78) gear at a fire station in Yuba City, California. Jeff had to leave a day early in order to

attend his daughter's wedding. I knew that the Captain on duty had started his career in the crew program, but was amazed to find out that the other two crew members on duty at that time had also started their careers in the Mendocino Crew Program. We had a mini-reunion at Station #4 in Yuba City.



What I miss the most about not doing the Organized Crew Program is giving young people jobs. I really feel that this country survived the early days of WWII on the foundation established by the CCC Program. From 1933-42 we put 3,000,000 young men into the forests of this country. They were mostly 18-20 years old and unemployed. They received \$30 a month with \$22-\$25 sent home to their families. The amount of work done by these men can be chronicled in the pages of our history.

As an active track coach at the high school level, I'm totally discouraged at the work ethic I see in our kids today. We have developed a society of people who are great with the computer, email, cell phones and texting. Could they step up and do the work of the CCC people of the 30s? No way, in my opinion. We have a soft, overweight society. If the job is not air conditioned, it is too hard.

During the track season I need a group of 3-4 people to be my hurdle crew. In order to run a three-hour track meet (which

is my standard), I need a small group of hard-working students to make the 500 moves of hurdles during a meet. Over the years I've found out that the hardest working athletes are either Cross Country runners or Wrestlers. Since the Cross Country athletes are also running track as your distance kids, I asked the wrestling coach for some workers. He gave me 4-5 kids who worked the meets over our season, and I was impressed with their work ethic. Finally, I had found some students who could make the rubber meet the road.

Lacking the ability to put 14-15 year-old kids on a fire crew, I wanted to find some jobs for them during the summer. The lack of jobs for kids is cutting away the foundation of our society.

Early on in my coaching career, I had a big young man who ran the 3rd leg on my 440-relay team that won the section championship. Fast forward to 2010 and his daughter is a runner on the Chico H.S. track team. I renewed a friendship that has been absent for 30+ years.

Rick (I won't give his last name) is the ultimate example of a self-made man. He is probably one of the largest non-corporate farmers in Northern California. There are no weekends in his schedule. In farming and the orchard business every day is a workday. It's like a fire season all year long.

I went to Rick and asked if there were any jobs for my young people who had done such a good job during the track season. Of course there are all the labor laws and reasons why 14-15 year-olds can't work, etc. But instead of listing the reasons why this wouldn't work (like we do with ideas in the public school systems), we decided that we could do field work as a fund-raiser. Car washes are OK, why not other types of work?

Now the rest of the story starts. Our first job was to pick roots in an old almond orchard where the trees had been ground to sawdust and a new orchard was being planted.

We reported to the field at 0600 the first day. The crew consisted of seven athletes and myself. The youngest were 15 and the oldest was one of my female hurdlers who attends Occidental College in Los Angeles. There were two white females: the hurdler and her younger sister who just graduated from Chico H.S. and was also my best hurdler this last season. The other five consisted of four wrestlers: four Hmongs, one Hispanic and one African-American. All were male.

The job: As a tractor pulling a large trailer drives down between two rows where there had previously been Almond Trees, we spread out to either side and picked up the roots that were left on the ground and threw them into the trailer. Easy to explain, hard to do.

When we got to the job at 0600 (I thought we'd start early to beat the heat), the regular crew had already been on the job an hour. They didn't know who we were as Rick hadn't gotten there to tell them that a coach and some high school kids

would be joining the work force. Fortunately my Hispanic wrestler could talk to the crew and smooth things out.

So we joined the fun. Bend over, pick up those roots, hustle over to the trailer and throw them in the back.

Now the challenge: The tractor keeps moving like a conveyor belt. Slow down and you are 10-yards behind the tractor. By 10:00 A.M. it is already 85 degrees going for 103 that day. I told the kids to bring hats, but they think a baseball cap will do. Fortunately, I bring a bunch of hats with wide brims, and the Hmong kids have hats their parents wear in the fields.

I thought that I was just going to be a supervisor but ended up having to push these kids like a fire crew in order to keep up with that damned tractor. 40,000 bend-overs later and it is only 10:00, and we have two hours to go. Don't know how long the rows were but the cars on the highway at the ends of the rows look like specks. I wisely scheduled six-hour workdays so I wouldn't have to bury anyone.

From 11:00 A.M. to noon it seemed like each minute was five minutes long. The only break we took was when the trailer was filled with roots, and it drove off to dump the load at the burn pile. Just time to sit down in the dirt and eat a piece of fruit or whatever. By noon I had some wide-eyed kids, and I wondered if anyone would show up for work the next day.

They all showed and surprisingly, day number two went faster. The same with day number three. I knew that the day three was the last for us, and we worked hard as we could see the light at the end of the tunnel. The regular workers, in addition

to coming back after lunch when we went home, still had three months to go.

It was an amazing experience. I felt that we kept up with the regular crews but, of course, I knew we couldn't have done the work they do day in and day out. A couple weeks later I paid off the kids. I was proud of their work ethic.

A couple thoughts: If I would have had those farm labor crews on the fireline, we could have built a line from Mexico to the Canadian Border. They were amazing workers.

I asked my hurdler who attends Occidental College what she got out of this experience. She said: That was the hardest job I've ever done and I have a deep respect for the work that the farm workers do on a daily basis.

I can second those thoughts. At the end of the first day I thought that if I were relegated to doing field labor I would head to McDonald's at the end of the first day and put in my application for a minimum wage job. I might start cleaning toilets, but it would be air-conditioned. From there I would go to dishwasher, fry cook, the counter and night manager in a year.

Bottom line: These were my best and hardest working kids. If I were to take our high school population out to the fields and pick roots, 99% of them would die on the job or not show the second day. Bring back the CCC program and ban cell phones and texting. 🙏

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