

## Off The List

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

Charles Brown, NSA Treasurer  
2723 Wilderness Ct.  
Wichita, KS 67226-2526

### Alan "Al" Dunton (Fairbanks '67)

Al Dunton died July 18, 2010, at his home in Reno, Nev. He began his fire career in his hometown of Molalla, Ore., in 1962, and spent his rookie year in Fairbanks in 1967. Al was the Alaska smokejumper base manager from 1972 to 1984 when he was appointed as state fire management officer in Nevada for the Bureau of Land Management. He moved to Boise in 1993, and from there retired from his career as national fire director for BLM at the Interagency Fire Center.

Al was instrumental in shaping the Alaska Smokejumpers and many of his visions and impacts can be seen in the jumper program to this day. His method of "Slow is smooth and smooth is fast" remains a phrase that only he seemed to be able to perfect.

Al passed on his penchant for wildland fire to his children; his daughter Amber worked at the Western Great Basin (fire) Coordination Center and his daughter **Melanie Dunton** (MYC-99) was a McCall smokejumper. His son-in-law **Dave Vining** (NIFC-97) was a BLM smokejumper and continues today as a fire management officer in Idaho. Even Al's wife, Mary, worked in BLM fire in Alaska for five years prior to becoming a teacher.

The family has established the Al Dunton Memorial Leadership Award through the NSA. In lieu of flowers, Al's family requests donations to NSA's Good Samaritan Fund at [http://www.smokejumpers.com/the\\_nsa/good\\_samaritan\\_fund.php](http://www.smokejumpers.com/the_nsa/good_samaritan_fund.php).

### Paul Block (Cave Junction '48)

Paul, 85, died August 2, 2010, in the crash of his home-built gyrocopter at the Illinois Valley Airport (former Siskiyou Smokejumper Base). The gyrocopter has a rotor like a helicopter and a propeller like an airplane. It appeared that something came off the tail section as Paul was preparing to land. Paul jumped at the "Gobi" for three seasons (1948-50) before moving south for a full-time job. After his retirement from his job as a public utility worker in the late 80s, he moved back to Cave Junction. He had flown for over 60 years and said, "It's nice to have an airport where there isn't

a tower and without planes being all over the sky." Any of us who worked on the Siskiyou Smokejumper Museum Project were able to see Paul and his flying machine as he loved flying and was in the air whenever he had a chance.

### Robert R. "Bob" Evans (Idaho City '53)

Bob died June 28, 2010, in Tucson, Arizona, after a brief illness. He grew up in River Edge, NJ and served in the Korean War as an airplane navigator. After his military service he attended Utah State University, graduating in 1956 with a BS in Journalism and later a MS in Sociology. During his time at Utah State, he spent the summers of 1953 and 1954 as a smokejumper based in Idaho City. He later earned a PhD in Sociology from the University of Wisconsin, and he and his wife, Carol, had a counseling practice in Tucson for the past 25 years. He also had a private pilot's license and his own Cessna, and led an active life with his family.

### Glenn F. Hale (McCall '57)

Glenn, 71, died August 24, 2010, in Payson, Ariz., after a long battle with chronic leukemia. He graduated from Payette High School in Payette, Idaho, in 1957. He spent seven seasons as a smokejumper, based in McCall and Silver City. He served in the U.S. Army Airborne as a parachute instructor from 1963 through 1965. He held a Master Parachute Rigger certification and for many years was a licensed pilot. He married Terry Lynelle Dinwiddie and for the first two years of their marriage, they lived on an air base in Savannakhet, Laos, where he worked for Continental Air Services, contracted with the Central Intelligence Agency. Upon their return to the U.S., he earned his bachelor's degree in business and real estate from the University of Arizona. Through Hale Construction, he designed and built nearly 500 custom homes throughout Tucson. He coached many youth basketball and baseball teams, and used his construction skills and contacts to improve sports facilities in Payson and Tucson. Glenn was a Life Member of the NSA.

### **Todd Sherwood (Missoula '76)**

Todd, 55, died from natural causes in Victor, Mont., August 24, 2010. A 1974 graduate of Hamilton High School, Todd started his career with the U.S. Forest Service and worked at the West Fork Ranger Station maintaining trails. The following year, he went to work for the Interagency Hotshot crew out of East Fork near Sula. Todd jumped in Missoula from 1976 through 1981 and 1984-85. Todd was a Life Member of the NSA. In the fire off-season, he attended college at the University of Montana and Montana Tech, graduating with a master's degree in electrical engineering in 1987. Upon graduation, Todd was chosen for the Who's Who list for the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, an honor granted to fewer than 1,000 graduates worldwide. He started his own engineering consulting firm, working in places such as Germany, Canada, Belgium, Alaska and the Arctic.

### **Philip Thomforde (Missoula '45)**

Phil, 89, died Feb. 23, 2010, in Pleasant Hill, Tenn. He graduated from Penn State University in 1942 with a degree in agriculture and registered as a conscientious objector when World War II broke out. That led to alternate service, including a one-year stint as a smokejumper in Missoula. Phil later worked in mental hospitals for war veterans in Philadelphia and was shocked by the conditions he saw. He spent two months on Welfare Island near New York City, eating sea biscuits and drinking salt water as part of a research project by the Army, causing damage to his teeth that lasted the rest of his life.

Phil served in China for the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Agency in 1946. He and his wife, Winnie, settled in Pennsylvania; he taught agriculture to high school students. He worked for UNESCO in Iran in 1956 as an agricultural advisor, moving to Italy in 1959 while working for the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization, a post he held for 22 years while visiting more than 70 countries. Phil retired in 1982.

### **William A. "Bill" Groman (Missoula '52)**

Bill died August 27, 2010, in Pebble Creek, Arizona, after a long battle with cancer. He graduated from Penn State University with his BA in forestry and earned his Masters and PhD in forestry from Oregon State University. Bill served in the US Army during the Korean War and was a professor in the School of Forestry at the University of Northern Arizona before his retirement.

### **Donald "Don" Marble (Missoula '60)**

Don, 72, died Aug. 22, 2010, in Tucson, Ariz., suc-

cumbing to pancreatic cancer. He graduated from the University of Michigan in 1963 with a master's degree in aeronautical engineering. He jumped in Missoula from 1960 to 1965. After getting his degree he was employed as an engineer for NASA in Mountain View, Calif. and worked on landing gear for the moon mission. He attended the University of Montana School of Law, from which he graduated in 1967. Don's legal career began in Havre, Mont., with the Legal Services program through which he provided legal aid. Don joined the law firm of Paul Bunn in Chester, Montana, in 1970. He practiced law in Chester until 2002, when he closed his private practice after being elected to the Liberty County Commission on which he served for six years. He also served on the boards of numerous professional and environmental organizations in Montana.

### **Jerry Dixon (McCall '71)**

Jerry, 62, a life member of the NSA, died in Seward, Alaska, Sept. 9, 2010, of amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, or ALS (Lou Gehrig's Disease). After jumping five seasons in McCall and one in Fairbanks, he became a fire management officer and a fire ecologist for the Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management and National Park Service. He also worked as a Yukon River ranger and a biologist, and enjoyed being a philosopher, climber, kayaker, extreme skier, conservationist and guide.

He taught the "Quest" program for gifted students in Seward, Moose Pass and Cooper Landing. In 1997 he was named a McAuliffe Fellow, and in 2001 he was named BP Teacher of the Year for the Kenai Peninsula. Jerry retired in 2003 because of his dismay at what he termed the "dramatic deterioration of quality education in the Seward schools and Alaska schools in general," caused by a lack of funding.

He wrote three books and many articles. Competing in wilderness ultra-marathons, Jerry traversed such courses as a brutal 180- to 200-mile course from Chicken to Central across the Tanana-Yukon uplands. He could speak four languages and had degrees in seven subject areas. One of Jerry's books, "Wild by Alaska," tells of his journey through the last great wilderness of North America. The story spans four decades of relentless pursuit of adventures, dangers, and excitement, and features 40 years' worth of Jerry's drawings. The Jerry S. Dixon Award for Excellence in Environmental Education was created in his honor.

### **Richard "Dick" Wilcomb (McCall '47)**

Dick, 84, died June 23, 2010. He attended the University of Idaho on a track scholarship and was one

of the top javelin throwers in the nation. Before college, he served in the Army Air Corps, predecessor of the U.S. Air Force, and jumped just one season – 1947 – in McCall. Dick became a partner in a construction firm, along with his father-in-law and brother-in-law in 1948; the company built hundreds of structures throughout the Landmark Valley of Idaho. He earned the “Friend of Preservation” award from the Boise City Historical Preservation Commission in 2002.

### **James Mattocks** (Missoula '45)

Jim, 91, died Sept. 10, 2010, in Greensboro, N.C. He graduated from High Point College in North Carolina in 1938 and from the Duke University Law School in 1941. As a conscientious objector, he served in the Civilian Public Service during World War II on the Blue Ridge Parkway, at Eastern State Mental Hospital in Virginia, and the 1945 season as a smoke-

jumper in Missoula. Jim practiced law in High Point from the end of the war until retiring in 1993. He helped establish the North Carolina American Civil Liberties Union, and the High Point Human Relations Commission named Jim and his wife, Edith, as High Point Citizens of the Year in 1985.

### **John D. “Jack” Wall** (Missoula '48)

Jack, 83, died September 28, 2010. He is survived by his wife of 49 years, Jane. Born in Ft. Sheridan, Illinois, Jack spent his life seeing the world. He was a Merchant Marine and enlisted in the Navy in his teens. In his 20s, he became a smokejumper for the Forest Service in Missoula, Montana, and from there was recruited by the CIA. Later in life he moved to Marana to work for Intermountain Aviation. He eventually retired from Evergreen Air Park in 1987. 🦅

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## Enjoying A Week At The Gobi

by Ed Booth (Assistant Editor)

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**Y**ou’ve undoubtedly heard the widely-used expression “There’s something for everyone” describing vacation spots. Sometimes it’s a bit of a stretch.

However, there’s no better way to describe the NSA Trail Maintenance Program. It gives you all the best parts of a vacation – nice weather, clean air, spectacular scenery – while offering you the chance to feel a true sense of accomplishment.

That’s what attracted me to help at the former Siskiyou Smokejumper Base outside Cave Junction last summer. As an editor for Smokejumper magazine, I’d seen stories talking about the restoration project ... and I decided to give it a try. What a thrill!

Why do I say “there’s something for everyone”? It’s true ... whether you come alone, or

with a spouse, or your children or grandchildren. The folks who came to Cave Junction that week fit all of those categories. The best part was, they all enjoyed themselves. You can, too.

The project was exactly as advertised. **Chuck Sheley** (CJ-59) immediately put me to work on his tree-trimming crew, along with **Dennis Golik** (MYC-74), **Mark Corbet** (LGD-74) and **Ron Thoreson** (CJ-60). I didn’t know anyone there except Chuck and his wife, K.G., but the camaraderie was strong, and I got to meet a lot of very nice people. The work could be strenuous at times, but seeing the finished product – nice, well-maintained landscaping – was a tremendous payoff.

Many of the people there had just come from the NSA reunion in Redding. A few spent some

time at the site on their way to other places. They were all united with the goal of bringing the aging facility to life again as a smokejumper museum – which appears to me as inevitable, though perhaps a couple of years away.

It became obvious to me right away that smokejumpers, regardless of age, have a remarkable bond. If there’s a task to be done, just a little direction is all they’ll need ... and it’ll get done. I enjoyed watching the transformation of the admin building while a new roof went up on the parachute loft.

Give the Trails Maintenance Program a try, regardless of the project or its location. I can guarantee you that as much as I had a good time as a non-jumper, you’ll have so much more fun in the company of comrades. 🦅

# A Simpler Time With Simpler Communications

by John Gordon (North Cascades '63)

**R**andy Tower (NCSB-63) and I were unlikely teammates on the same Little League baseball team in Winthrop, Wash., in the late 1950s.

Randy's father, **Wally Tower**, was the well-known pilot for the Intercity Smokejumpers (later, North Cascade Smokejumper Base – NCSB). My mother, Dee, was the clerk for the project manager and smokejumper pioneer **Francis Lufkin** (NCSB-40).

The Towers (mom, dad, two boys and a girl) arrived early in the summer every year and occupied the one-bedroom trailer near the river, across the landing strip from the base.

The summers were occupied with baseball, riding bikes, hunting for arrowheads, fishing and hiking the many trails of the Methow Valley. During the rest of the year, the family lived in Okanogan, Wash., a mere jaunt of 35 miles across the Loup Loup, a mountain pass between the valleys of the Methow and the Okanogan.

Although they were considered outsiders, the Towers were eagerly welcomed each summer as a smokejumper family and valley residents.

A typical day for me, a youth of 10-13 years of age, was to rise early in the morning, bat rocks with a makeshift bat (usually an old tool handle or hardwood branch), shoot some baskets and take a few bike rides. Several days a week I secured an inflated inner tube, a fishing pole, and a stringer

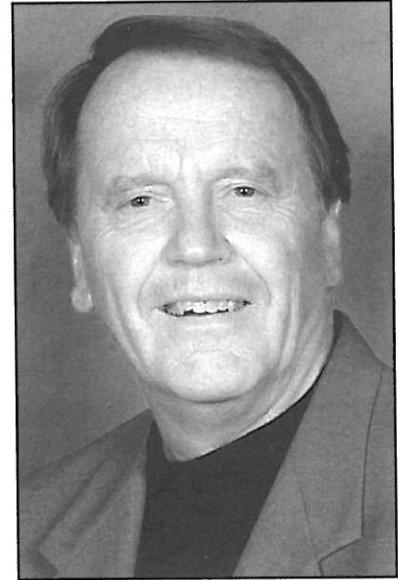
for fish to float the river from Heckendorn (south Winthrop) to the smokejumper base.

Actually, Heckendorn was established when the "great flood of 1948" dislodged homes in Winthrop, and they landed in a flat near the residence of a pioneer by the name of Heckendorn. It appears there was not a building code that insisted the homes be connected by rebar to their foundations.

The float was approximately four miles and, depending upon the number of fish caught, it would take over half a day. Most days, Mr. Lufkin's son **Larry Lufkin** (CJ-63) – a classmate of mine – and I would begin at noon and be ready to ride home when Mom would get off work in the late afternoon.

Randy and his brother, Denny, were usually by the riverbank fishing or skipping rocks when we arrived. After running around the smokejumper base for several hours, we would throw the tubes in Mr. Lufkin's truck to be dropped off so the same routine could be followed at a later date.

One day, I got word that baseball practice had been moved to a day earlier than scheduled, and Randy needed to be notified. Knowing that the trailer had no phone and that trying to get my Mom to run across the runway to the riverbank would be a hostile request, I decided to try another method of communication. My plan was to drop a bottle in the river and hope it followed the



*John Gordon (Courtesy J. Gordon)*

path I took when tubing and would land in the eddy by the smokejumper base for my friend Randy to find.

I secured a glass bottle with a screw-top lid and inserted a note with the change in times and a "you better be there" notice. I waded to the middle of the Methow River, dropped the bottle in the strong current about mid-morning and awaited the results.

Amazingly, the experiment worked. Randy found the bottle floating in the swirling eddy just below the trailer in time to get his mother to deliver him to practice that afternoon.

Interestingly, Randy and I continued as teammates for several years when I was invited to play on the Okanogan Babe Ruth team. Randy's father, Wally, had moved on to be the chief pilot for Region 6 and spent the summers

in Troutdale, Ore.

Following high school graduation in the summer of 1963, Randy and I, along with fellow classmate and Little Leaguer **Ashley Court** (NCSB-63), were among the 16 rookie smokejumpers at Intercity. Following the two weeks of training, we prepared for our first practice jump.

Amazingly, Randy and I were assigned to be “jump partners.” As we boarded the plane, we saw a familiar face in the cockpit of the Twin Beech – Wally Tower,

who had flown from Oregon to pilot our first jump. We made one more jump together that year; then Randy was off to be a charter member of the Redmond smokejumpers.

Randy and I still communicate periodically via e-mail. We renew our friendship when we return for reunions and laugh about the note-in-the-bottle message. We also share another laugh about living in the trailer, as I resided there my last two years of jumping in early 1973 and 1974. 🦋

*John Gordon was a smokejumper at Winthrop from 1963 to 1969 and 1973-74. He was an educator in Washington State from 1967 to 2000, serving as a teacher, assistant principal, principal, assistant superintendent and superintendent. Following his first retirement in 2000, he served as a superintendent in Arizona for five years and currently is the Director of Leadership Development for Arizona School Boards Association. You can reach John at: john.winthrop@cox.net.*

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# The Traumatic Initiation Of A First-Year Squadleader

by **Ross Parry** (Missoula '58)

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**N**ineteen sixty-one was a dry year, a hot year, and a busy year for firefighters. It was especially busy for smokejumpers.

I was a new squadleader. I had previously spotted jumpers (on small fires), dropped cargo, and been in charge of three- or four-man fires. I was still a little apprehensive about my new responsibilities.

On the afternoon of Aug. 2, I was assigned to spot a 16-man crew on the Kelly Mountain fire. Kelly Mountain was on the lower portion of the Salmon River in Idaho. **Hal Samsel** (MSO-49) was the foreman in charge of the crew. Hal and I were good friends—we carpooled—and we had worked together on many smokejumper projects on base.

Hal was an “old hand,” so he was instrumental in picking the jump spot. Everything went quite well. Most of the jumpers landed fairly close to the spot.

The next morning, I was called as second in command on a 12-man crew to be dropped on that same Kelly Mountain fire. **Cliff Blake** (MSO-55) was squadleader in charge. (Incidentally, Cliff was the star in a Walt Disney production, *A Fire Called Jeremiah*, which had been filmed the previous year and which was shown a few times on Disney’s TV show, *The Wonderful World of Disney*. It was also released to public schools.)

As we flew down the Salmon River canyon that morning, I was watching for the spot where I had spotted 16

jumpers the previous afternoon. I was shocked to see that the area where they had been dropped had been completely burned over by the fire. I later learned that Hal Samsel and his crew had been forced to run to a rockslide. All their gear was burned in the fire.

Our crew that morning was dropped on top of Kelly Mountain in an alder patch with brush so thick you could barely fight your way through it. We had no sooner assembled with our gear than **Doug Getz** (MSO-58), who was the foreman in charge of the Grangeville jumpers that year, came running up to us and told us to get the hell out of there because if that fire started to run, as was expected, we were goners. Apparently Doug and most of his Grangeville jumpers were on that fire.

By the time we had worked our way out of the danger zone, it had been decided by “somebody up there” that there were too many jumpers being tied up on one fire. So our crew was loaded on a truck and hauled up to Grangeville to what, we hoped, would be a plane ride back to Missoula.

The next morning, the Grangeville dispatcher came running up to our Missoula crew and said they needed an overhead (squadleader or foreman) for an eight-man fire. He said all the Grangeville overhead were gone. Since Cliff was in charge of our crew, he felt he should continue with them back to base. Therefore, it was up to me to “volunteer.”

I told the dispatcher I'd take the fire, but I didn't have any jump gear because mine was still back on Kelly Mountain. I was suited up with odds and ends and we were off.

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*I told the dispatcher I'd take the fire, but I didn't have any jump gear ...*

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We were loaded into the Ford Trimotor and headed out to the Higgins Ridge Fire. It was still fairly early in the day—only about 9 or 9:30 a.m. The fire was quite high on the ridge and only about an acre in size and didn't look too bad.

After the jump, we assembled with our tools and started to attack the fire. We had two experimental fire-line trenching machines that would flail a chain and create a 12- or 18-inch-wide trench. The trenching machines did not consistently create acceptable line, so we had to follow up with the crew using traditional shovel and pulaski methods, but we were able to create line at a more rapid rate than was usual.

At first the winds were relatively calm, but the fire conditions were extreme and embers kept drifting up over our line and creating spot fires outside. I remember a couple of occasions when I would find spot fires in the middle of old stumps or on top of logs, and these fires had started and were burning without any supporting light fuels; it was mind-boggling. Although I was working very hard at trying to control these spot fires, it became necessary on two occasions to abandon our line and call back the crew to extend the line around a spot fire that had spread out of control.

It became apparent to me that we were not going to be able to control the fire without help. Just as I was beginning to feel that it was hopeless, we heard a plane and looked up to see the first stick of a 12-man crew jumping to our assistance. It was probably about 1:30 in the afternoon. I breathed a sigh of relief; maybe now we could hold our own until evening and then contain the fire during the night.

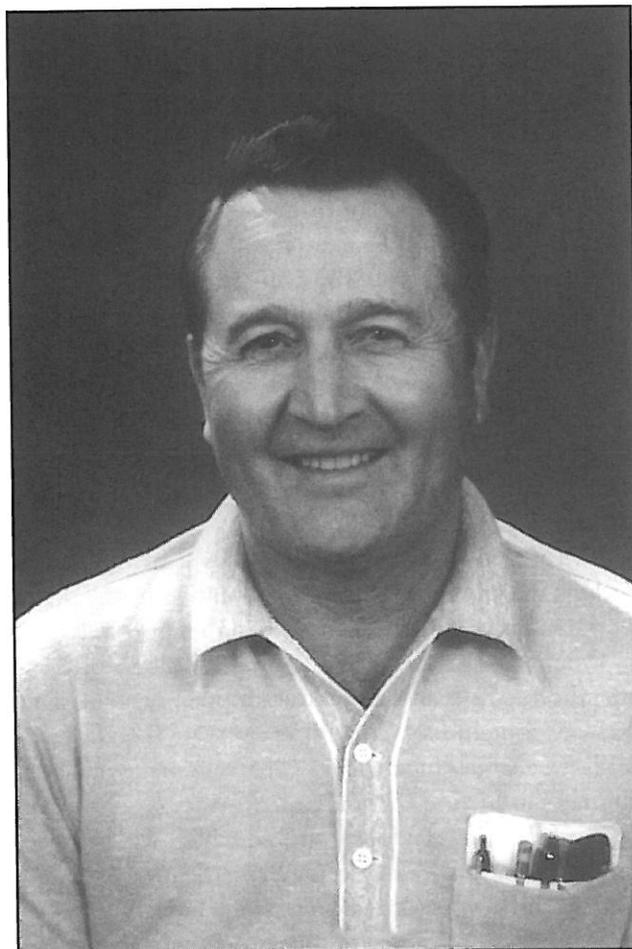
Fritz Wolfrum (MSO-53) and his crew soon joined us. We decided that the main threat of spread was on the west side of the ridge where we were currently working. Fritz, a smokejumper foreman, suggested that he continue with the majority of the men on the west side while I took five men to the other side. We could work up the ridge and hopefully pinch it off during the night. My crew consisted of both Grangeville jumpers and Missoula jumpers.

We had been working for a couple of hours when the fire blew up. It blew up so violently, furiously and swiftly

that it defied description. Up ahead there was a roar and smoke billowing up as though from a volcanic eruption, and the fire started racing down around us faster than a man could run. I remember that some of the jumpers kept looking at me with wide eyes, but they didn't say anything. I am usually a stickler for hanging in there, but I told them that we had better get the heck out of there. They didn't hesitate a second as they dropped their tools, and we headed back to a rock pile that we had passed earlier as we were building our line. We didn't waste any time doing it.

As we were hurrying back along our line toward the rock pile, my mind was racing a hundred miles per hour—what were our options? We could not run straight down the mountain to the east because the fire had already cut us off and was running down around us faster than we could move. We could, however, take off at a dead run to the point of the ridge to the north and then, hopefully, be able to run down the mountain before the fire circled around us from the west. Or we could take our chances in the rock pile.

I didn't know what was best, but did not have time to stop and take a vote; it was up to me! I decided on



Ross Parry (Courtesy R. Parry)

the rock pile.

When we reached the rock pile, it seemed to be a lot smaller than I had remembered (about half the size of a small house). I told the jumpers to dig themselves a hole in the rocks and hunker down. One of the men came up to me and appeared on the verge of tears as he told me that he didn't want to die.

I wasn't sure whether he was questioning my decision to hole up in the rocks or whether he was just expressing the fear that each and every one of us was experiencing. I told him I thought we would be okay there. We hunkered down.

We only had two or three minutes before the fire swooped up over us from the northeast. In a way we were lucky, because the fire had circled around us so fast that it came up from the north and left about a 50-foot-wide patch of unburned trees and brush on the uphill side of the rocks. A few minutes later when that uphill section burst into flames, we were then able to move somewhat to the other side of the pile and avoid some of the heat.

Even so, it was intense. We had many holes burned in our clothes; the embers that landed on tightly stretched cloth would be detected and slapped out quickly, but those that landed in creases or on loose clothing would smolder and sometimes begin to blaze before being detected.

I remember being hunkered down and hearing a clink on the rocks. Looking around, I saw my canteen cover on fire; it had burned through and the canteen had dropped out. Also, I remember being surprised at all the fires in the rocks; apparently, over the years, debris, twigs, and needles had settled into the crevices and these were now on fire.

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After a while, when the heat and smoke had diminished and it became apparent that we were going to survive, one of the jumpers came over to me and asked what I thought had happened to the other crew. He probably had a couple of buddies in that crew; we all did. I told him that in my opinion, if they had been able to get into the old burn, they might have made it.

My assessment was probably not much comfort, but it was honest, and I expect it agreed pretty much with

his own.

At this point, I'd like to interject a description of this fire from Earl Cooley's (MSO-40) book *Trimotor and Trail*. He apparently compiled his account from interviews with the jumper foreman, Fritz Wolfrum, and some of the jumpers in the Missoula crew. I quote:

"As in every tough fire season, the jumpers had some close calls. The worst one happened on August 4, when 20 jumpers led by Fred Wolfrum were working on the Higgins Ridge fire on the Nez Perce National Forest. The fire blew up and encircled the jumpers. Tree sap became steam and blew trees apart. The intense fire draft created a 60-mile-an-hour whirlwind at the core of the fire. It uprooted trees and flung rocks. It appeared that the only refuge available was the top of the ridge where the fire was started and where a small opening offered some hope of helicopter rescue. One of the jumpers was Tom Kovalicky (MSO-61), later to become supervisor of the Nez Perce. As Kovalicky made his way up the ridge, he saw the timber on a half-mile of hillside go up in flames in 30 seconds.

"When they reached the burnt-over clearing, Wolfrum told the crew to dig away the ash and lie flat against the earth. The heat and flames were almost unbearable, but the men held their ground. Kovalicky helped a jumper beat out his flaming clothing. He fully expected to be cooked by the heat or crushed by a falling tree.

"His senses numb from the heat and smoke, Kovalicky thought he saw a tree falling toward him. He tried to roll out of the way but was too weak to move. Then he recognized the sounds of a helicopter. Kovalicky was actually looking at the skids of a helicopter hovering a few feet over his head. Fortunately, the pilot pulled up for a better look at the landing spot and Kovalicky was able to get out of the way. As soon as the copter touched down, two men with the worst injuries were loaded aboard and flown out. The pilot, Rod Snider (NCSB-51), promised to return for the rest of the crew—if he could land. Fortunately he was able to keep his promise, making trip after trip through the flames until all the jumpers had been rescued. Some of the jumpers were flown to safety by hanging onto the copter skids.

"For this exploit, Rod Snider was awarded the North American Forest Fire Medal, which is reserved for heroism of the highest order. He knew that the 20-man crew was somewhere on the ridge and suspected that they might be in serious trouble. So he went looking for them. He had about given up the search when he spotted them lying in the ash of the ridge top. Had they not been wearing special orange shirts treated to retard fire, he might never have spotted them through the smoke and flame. This was the first year jumpers and hotshot crews wore such shirts."

One point of the preceding copter rescue that should probably be clarified is that the jumpers who hung onto the skids of the copter were not dangling by their arms as in a James Bond movie but were actually lying on top of narrow rope mesh platforms that had been built over the skids to haul cargo. Nevertheless, the fact that the pilot would go to such extreme measures helps to portray the severity of the situation.

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As it turned out, the burnt-over area in which Fritz and his crew had survived was only about 300 yards up the ridge from where my crew and I had holed up in the rocks. By the time the copter first located the jumpers on the ridge top, the smoke was beginning to thin a bit and the heat and fire diminish a little. Consequently, we in the rocks eventually heard the helicopter and, for a brief moment, saw an orange shirt up on the ridge top.

We were reluctant to leave the safety of our rocks, but I told the crew that we needed to make our way up to the top. We were slow and careful, so it took a while and by the time we got there most of the other crew had been ferried to safety. When we arrived at the top, the helicopter was just leaving the last of Fritz's crew.

However, a uniformed Forest Service officer who had been with the helicopter when it first landed was still there with his radio. I'm not sure who he was, but apparently he had seen us coming up through the smoke and flames. After my small crew had been ferried out, the FS employee and I and his radio were loaded up, and we were finally all out of there.

It would be hard to overemphasize the bravery of Rod Snider. I sincerely believe that it took as much courage to land his copter under the conditions that existed as it did for many of the pilots who came down through enemy fire in Vietnam to rescue injured or soldiers surrounded

by the enemy. Rod figured that some of the jumpers were injured and/or dying and he did not hesitate.

The next morning, most of the jumpers were ferried out to Elk Summit to the nearest road, which was about 25 miles by trail but only about 10 as the crow flies. From there, they were hauled to Missoula. Some of them received treatment at St. Patrick's Hospital but there were no serious injuries. However, five of the original Grangeville jumpers did not feel they needed treatment and they wanted to get back to their base.

Since I was in charge of that crew, I felt obligated to stay with them until they were safely back to base. So we spent that day retrieving cargo from cargo drops and helping set up a major fire camp for a "project" fire. The fire by then was about 6,000 acres. Late that afternoon, fire crews started to stagger in from Elk Summit. Many of these crews were not seasoned firefighters and were ill prepared for the more than 25-mile hike to the fire.

Consequently, some of the crew leaders, who were for the most part FS employees, came into camp with only a portion of their original crew. The others had dropped out somewhere along the way.

That evening, the camp boss, or fire boss, or "some boss," sent a couple of us jumpers back along the trail with flashlights to try to bring some of the stragglers into camp. I personally walked back about two or three miles, frequently finding groups of two or three men huddled around a campfire, but with the promise of good grub and a warm sleeping bag, I was able to lead about 15 men back to the fire camp.

The next morning, our crew was ferried to Moose Creek Ranger Station to await the next available flight back to Grangeville, or in my case back to Missoula. There were no roads to the station, but there was an airstrip.

Shortly after we arrived at Moose Creek, Rod Snider came up to me and said that as he was flying over a secluded draw on the north side, he had spotted three parachutes that had not been burned. I was not overly thrilled to hear that news, but now that I knew it, I felt we should probably try to retrieve the gear. Rod said that he could probably help by dropping off some jumpers on a sharp ridge above the draw.

I told him I'd try to find another copter to drop off a couple more. We could then haul the gear up to a saddle on the ridge where we could clear a helicopter spot so that he could land later and pick up the gear and the men. I approached another copter pilot at Moose Creek and asked if he could drop off a couple of men on a ridge top on his way to Elk Summit so they could retrieve some jumper gear.

I told him that Rod had said that it was a really tough and tricky spot where they had to drop the jumpers off.

He arrogantly told me that he could land his copter anywhere that Rod could land his.

By now Rod and I had decided that it might be possible to let a rope dangle down through the trees to the jumpers. They could tie the gear they had retrieved onto the rope so Rod could haul it up to a drop spot where we would have a jumper untie it. So we took off.

Rod, myself, and a jumper who was to untie the gear were in his copter and two other jumpers were in the other copter. Rod could not land at the spot where we let off the jumper; it was just a rock outcrop on the ridge. He just kind of hovered on the edge of it while the jumper stepped off.

We circled so the other copter could let the two other jumpers off. It came over the spot, hovered for a second and then took off. It circled and came slowly back over the spot and then headed out to Elk Summit; there was no way that pilot was going to try Rod's maneuver. Later, that pilot crashed his helicopter into the pond at Elk Summit, so it is probably a very good thing that he did not try to let those jumpers off.

Rod flew on to Elk Summit, dropped me off, picked up the two jumpers from the other copter, dropped them off at the ridge, flew to Moose Creek, picked up the other two jumpers, and dropped them off at the ridge on his

way back to pick me up.

When Rod got back to Elk Summit, we tied a 100-foot rope to the center of the helicopter and dangled it out over the passenger side. I was sitting on top of the rope and holding the coils so that I could let it down when we got over the retrieval site. Also, at Rod's instructions, I was holding a knife from an emergency chute in my hand. (These knives were not very good nor sharp.)

We flew over the first retrieval site. I let down the rope and the jumpers tied the gear to the rope, then we lifted off and carried it to the drop-off spot where the jumper there untied the gear. Then we flew to the second retrieval site. At this site, the jumpers had retrieved two sets of gear so that the bundle they tied on weighed somewhere in the neighborhood of 150 pounds.

We lifted up but not quite enough because as we headed out over the main canyon, the dangling bundle nicked the top of a tall spruce tree and that bundle started to sway back and forth under the helicopter.

Rod yelled at me, "Cut the rope! Cut the rope!" So I started to cut the rope, but before I was halfway through, Rod screamed at me, "CUT THAT ROPE!" That bundle went sailing off into never-never land (I doubt that it has ever been found) and Rod looked over at me and said, "Well, that's the end of that."

I got the feeling that maybe we had come closer to meeting our maker from that little endeavor than we had from the fire and the fire rescue.

I don't remember the details of how we eventually got back to our respective bases, but one thing I must say is that those Grangeville jumpers that I was in charge of on the Higgins Ridge Fire – especially the crew that stayed after the rescue – were one of the best crews I was ever involved with. However, they are just typical of most smokejumpers.

The original seven Grangeville smokejumpers who were with me as the first eight-man crew were **Roger A. Burluson** (MSO-61), **Rodger Wade Erwin** (MSO-59), **Dale E. Graff** (MSO-60), **Mark Greydanus** (MSO-60), **John A. Holtet** (MSO-61), **Roy E. Korkalo** (MSO-61), and **William G. Schroeder** (MSO-61). I don't remember for sure which of these seven were the men who stayed with me after the original helicopter fire rescue. 🦅

*Ross retired from the Forest Service in 1988 as a computer systems analyst. He can be reached at: 2109 E 6075 S, Ogden UT 84403.*

*Rod Snider started jumping in 1951 for three seasons at Winthrop. He then entered a 50+ year career as a pilot in the USAF, Johnson Flying Service, Boise Cascade Corp., and contract pilot to the USFS and BLM. Personal flying involved building two airplanes and 30 years hang gliding. Rod is an NSA member.*

## Cave Junction Jumpers

### Planning Notice - 2011

by Tommy Albert (CJ-64)

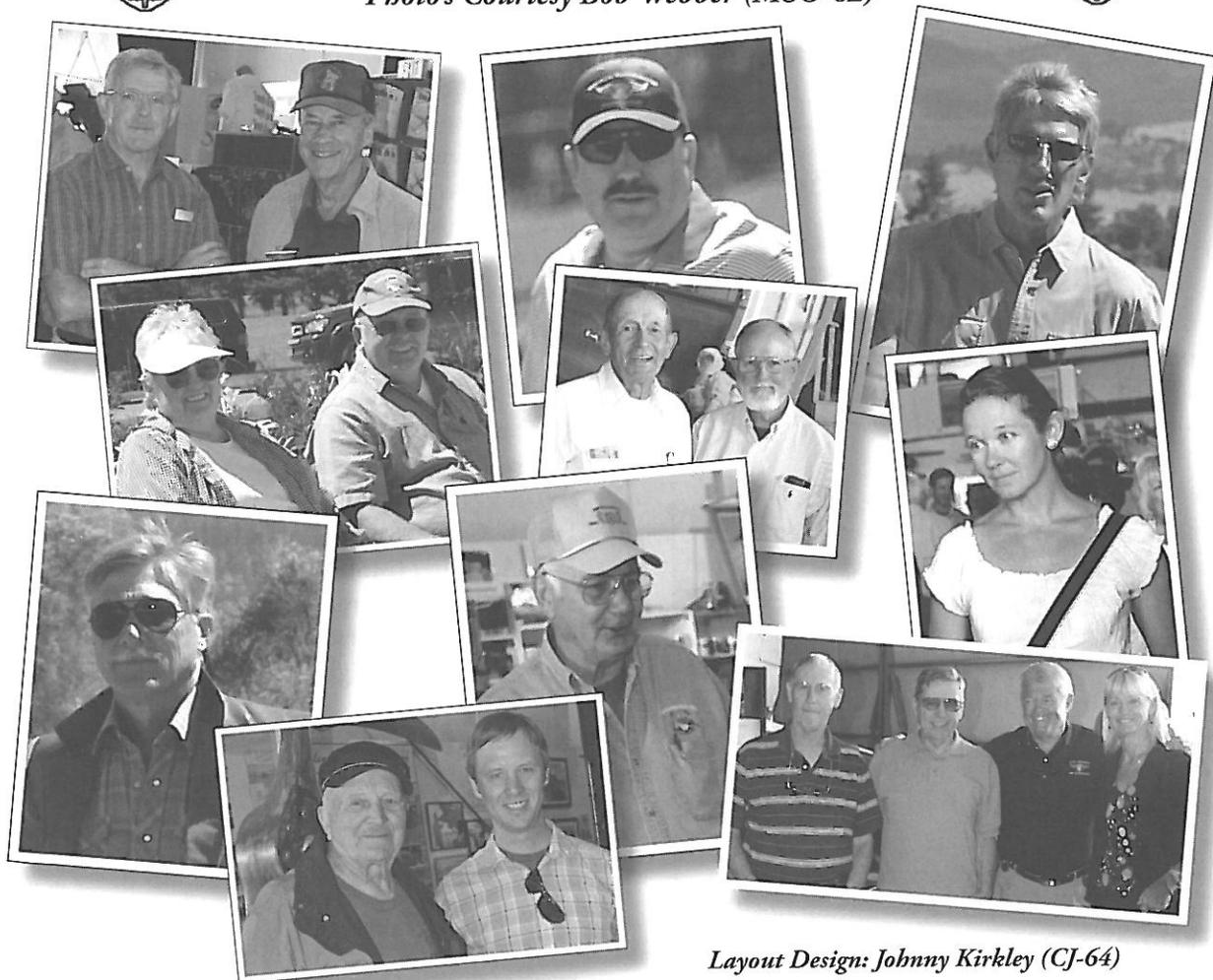
**Siskiyou Smokejumper Base Reunion** June 10-12. We are a diminishing breed. This may well be the last Gobi Reunion for many of us. Let's make it a good one. See you there.

**Siskiyou Smokejumper Base Museum Work Week** June 13-17. Tremendous progress has been made in the past two years. This week will culminate some of the major projects. All of you are invited to participate.

**Moon Tree Dedication** - September 17. Stuart Roosa (CJ-53), Command Module Pilot on Apollo 14, carried tree seeds and had Astronauts Alan Shepard and Edgar Mitchell take the seeds to the Moon in the Lunar Module. These seeds were returned and are now seedlings to be planted on the Siskiyou Smokejumper Base Museum site. We hope to have a national presence for this event. All of you are encouraged to attend.



**Jon McBride Memorial**  
*Photo's Courtesy Bob Webber (MSO-62)*



*Layout Design: Johnny Kirkley (CJ-64)*