

Smoke jumpers. . .

The jump is the best part



Smoke jumper Mark Jackson, a Warm Springs tribal member, sits in plane used to transport jumpers to scene of fire. Boxes in compartment are loaded with provisions for fire-fighters making jumps.

Two-and-a-half weeks of rigorous physical training qualifies you to parachute out of a plane into a blazing forest. This may sound like a horror story for most people, but for some, it's a dream come true.

"I've always wanted to do it," commented smoke jumper Mark Jackson when asked "Why?" It's an occupation you have to want to do to do it well.

This is Jackson's first season as a smoke jumper with the U.S. Forest Service. He looks

forward to many more hoping to gain experience in the many aspects of smoke jumping from mending parachutes to continuous fire-fighting experience.

After having been called to five fires, he finds the most exhilarating part of the job as smoke jumper is the jump. Weeks of training finally qualified him to make his first jump. The first jump produces a feeling of apprehension in all trainees, according to Jackson

but it's all worth it.

Besides training in parachute jumps, smoke jumper trainees must meet minimum physical requirements necessary to the demands of the job. Qualifications for smoke jump training requires running one-half mile in eleven minutes, timed sit-ups, push-ups and pull-ups, and being able to pack 110 pounds, three miles, in 90 minutes or less.

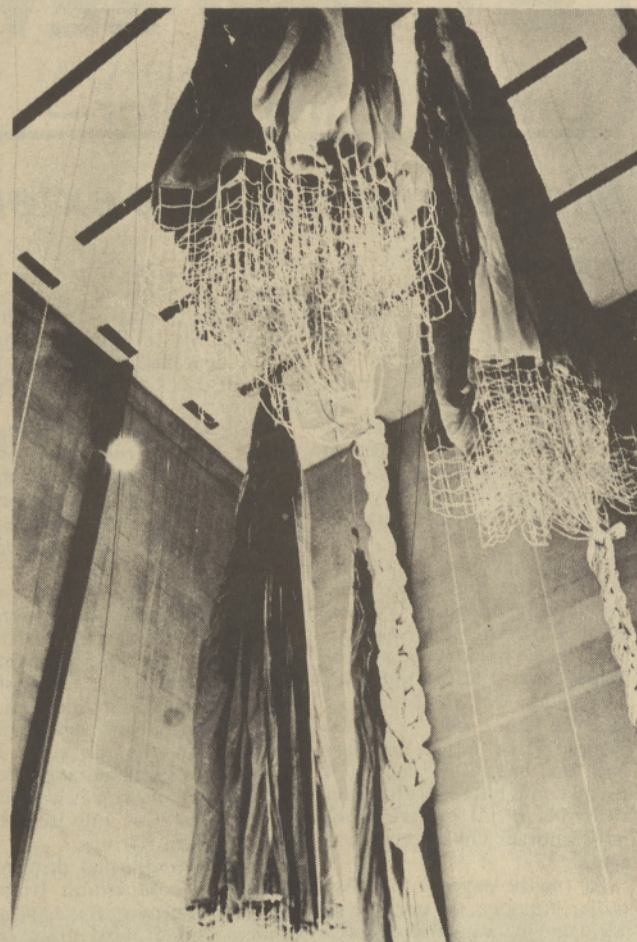
Only after these requirements are met can the trainee go on to learn airplane exit procedures, landing rolls, let downs and advanced fire-fighting techniques. Physical fitness training continues on a daily basis.

Smoke jumpers are not called on all fires. Their speciality is fires with difficult access where time is important. Many jumpers live in barracks at the Redmond station. When called, smoke jumpers respond immediately boarding one of two planes already stocked with equipment necessary for firefighting and provisions for several days. These boxes are dropped along with smoke jumpers, each box having its own parachute.

The eleven trainees out of 23 who were able to complete smoke jump training this season look forward to each of those jumps and they also look forward to seeing a destructive fire suppressed.

The fire-fighting, itself is "grunt" work as Jackson terms it. It requires long hours and hard work, but that one jump to get to the scene of the fire makes the many arduous hours tolerable.

Spilyay Tymoo
photos by
Marsha Shewczyk



After used parachutes are thoroughly examined for tears and soiling. They are hung from the ceiling and lowered while repairs are made by smoke jumpers, themselves.



Advance smoke jumpers have the opportunity to become qualified in many areas. Tony Navorro from Montana practices folding parachutes. Once folded and put in a bag the rigger initials the pack.



Parachute jumps are first made from cables extending from a tower at the Redmond training center. Jackson explains the procedure.