

Smokejumpers Train at Project Base Near Cave Junction

Physical Training Included In U.S. Forest Service Program

By RON ABELL
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It's 5 in the morning and a steady blast of cold air rushes through the open door of the small airplane. At 1,000 feet you swallow hard and try to smile as you watch the horizon tilt drunkenly from side to side. Beneath you the forested hills spread and flatten until individual trees lose their identity and they melt into a rugged green corrugation. At 1,500 feet the plane levels off.

You're with a training crew of U.S. forest service smokejumpers. You've got a parachute strapped on your back-for safety-and it's cramped inside the small twin-engine Beechcraft. Beside yourself there are four jumpers and a "spotter" inside the body of the plane. You can reach out and touch any one of them.

A pilot and co-pilot are in the cockpit, six feet away, but the noise of the motors necessitates the use of a telephone between them and the spotter. Two of the jumpers are sitting on the floor at your feet and two are next to you on the short bench. At a motion from the spotter the nearest jumper slides over and kneels just inside the door. He puts a foot outside and waits, tense.

The plane passes over a flat meadow and the pilot cuts the motors. You're going 80 m.p.h. but it feels as if you've suddenly stopped. Only the cold rush of air gives you the feeling of motion. "Go!"

The spotter slaps the jumper on the shoulder and the jumper steps out into space and disappears. It's that simple. His static line plays out, opening his chute, and the plane increases speed and starts to bank. In a moment you can see the red and white canopy drifting down to the landing meadow.

Second Jumper As you circle back, another jumper starts to move over to the door and far below you can see a parachute collapse as the first jumper lands safely on the ground. The warning rays of the morning sun wink off the wingtip of the plane and you begin to loosen up. You think it might be fun to jump.

Meanwhile, down on the ground, a small crowd has collected to watch the jumpers in action. This is the third day of jumping for the new men, who have to complete seven training jumps before they're allowed to go out on fires. Two and a half weeks of intense training and conditioning have preceded their first jump and they handle themselves well. But they're having trouble hitting the mark this morning because it's windy.

The ground foreman is in contact with the plane by mobile radio and he decides to call the jumping off because of the wind. The men who have already jumped are collecting their gear and walking back through the field. There's a truck waiting to take them back to the base and you're invited to come along for breakfast. It's only 7 a.m. but you've been up for three hours and you accept the invitation.

Besides, you want to learn more about these smokejumpers. What sort of work do they do? Select Group The smokejumpers are a select group of young men. Of the thousands of fire fighters who work in national forests during the summer, only 320 are smokejumpers. They are stationed at one of the five bases where they get their training.

Their job is fire suppression in areas that are relatively inaccessible from the ground. In minutes, a smoke-jumping crew can fly into an area that would take a ground crew hours to reach. They are hit-and-run specialists seldom called out on a big fire, they perform invaluable service in small isolated fires. Almost all of the fires they are called to are caused by lightning strikes. The smokejumpers' value derives from the fact that they can fly in quickly and suppress the fire before it spreads. Often they are relieved by a ground crew after they've done the primary suppression.

Any one of the fires they're called to could spread into a major conflagration if it wasn't contained in time. The

smokejumpers are crack-jack fire-fighters with a "plus" value-they're trained in getting to fires the fast and hard way: from the air. It takes courage, conditioning, and training.

South of Cave Junction In Josephine county just south of Cave Junction, 63 miles from Medford, is the Siskiyou smokejumper base. With a complement of 30 men, it's the only such base in Oregon. Nestled in the Illinois valley about 10 miles north of the California border, the Siskiyou base can send a crew of smokejumpers out in 15 minutes' notice. In an average season 111 jumps will be made at 35 fires. Each man will make 10 jumps and there will be an average of three men sent to each fire.

After salaries and operating expenses are deducted they will save taxpayers an estimated \$125,000 in timber saved through their efforts.

Project air officer at the Siskiyou base is 35-year-old Jim Allen. Jim was a combat paratrooper during World War II and has been with the forest service since 1946. He's the man with the facts and figures.

If you accepted your break-fast invitation and sat down for a talk with Jim you'd learn a lot about smokejumping.

First Fire Jump in 1940 You'd find out that the first fire jump was made in Montana in 1940, the summer after experimental work was begun in Washington. Now, 20 years later, over 30,000 jumps have been made without a fatality incurred while jumping.

The largest smokejumper base is at Missoula, Mont., with 150 men. A base at McCall, Idaho, has 80 men. The Okanogan base at Winthrop, Wash., has 36 men.

The Siskiyou base has 30 men and a base at Redding, Calif., has 24 men. A base at Silver City, N. M., draws men from the other units during the short fire season there.

In addition to these U.S. forest service bases, the bureau of land management maintains a 16-man base at Fairbanks, Alaska, and that accounts for all the smokejumpers in the United States.

Taking the Siskiyou base as representative, you'd learn that its primary jump area includes the Siskiyou, Rogue River, Umpqua, Willamette, Deschutes, Mt. Hood, and Siuslaw national forests.

Siskiyou jumpers have gone as far south as Sequoia National Park in California, however, and as far north as the Canadian line. They jump only in state and national forests.

What sort of men are the smokejumpers?

Athletic Equipment A tour of the grounds at Siskiyou would give you an idea. An outdoor athletic area contains punching bags, weights, chinning bars, a basketball court and a volleyball court.

Adjoining this area is the training area, complete with ropes, a tower, a trampoline, an obstacle course, and other training apparatus.

Physical fitness is of primary importance. The conditioning of the smokejumpers isn't just excellent; it's superb.

They have to be tough and limber to absorb the bumps and knocks of parachuting and then do the shoveling and chopping work of fire-fighting.

When their work is done they face a hike out of the area, to the nearest road, that might be anywhere from a half-mile to 10 miles or more. On this hike they bring their equipment back with them. The longest back-pack Jim can recall was 40 miles.

Fire Pack With a fire pack (dropped individually to each man), jumping suit, parachute and spare chute, first-aid kit, protective hat, and canteen, the equipment weighs a minimum of 70 pounds. It often goes over 100 pounds.

It's no wonder the new smokejumpers get 20 hours of physical conditioning during their training.

They also get over 50 hours of fire-suppression training, including three days of guard school. At guard school they work with fire-fighters from the entire Siskiyou forest.

Their training calls for 10 hours of first aid.

They get 60 hours of jump training, including tower jumps, chute manipulation, tree climbing, and chute retrieving.

New Men Sixteen new men were accepted for training this season at Siskiyou-out of 180 applicants. Jim Allen and his foreman, Al Boucher, can afford to be selective. They pick the men who appear to be the cream of the crop.

And they guess consistently well: their drop-out rate only runs about 10 per cent.

"We prefer men who are first-year college men," Jim said. "About 60 to 70 per cent of our new men will return the following year and we like to get them early so they can stay with us for a few seasons."

He explained that when the men finish college, permanent employment usually takes them away from smokejumping.

Qualifications Men accepted for smoke-jumper training must have had one season of fire suppression work. They must be between 18 and 28 years old, be in sound physical health (including eyesight and hearing), and meet height and weight requirements.

Training this year runs from June 15 to July 13. By the 13th the new men will be qualified jumpers, bringing the total number of ready jumpers to 30.

They live, sleep and eat at the base. They can be airborne fifteen minutes after they're notified of a fire.

Boucher says, "Our cooks are our proudest possessions. They work seven days a week for the whole summer and we're really proud of the meals they give the men."

Flying the twin-engine Beechcraft this season is a new man with the forest service, Dick Foy of 2764 Orchard Home dr., Medford. Dick and his wife, Peggie, live next to the base.

Pay of \$2 Per Hour The men themselves show an enthusiasm for the work that goes beyond the limits of the job. You know they like it when you hear that their average pay rate is \$2 an hour. It's slightly higher

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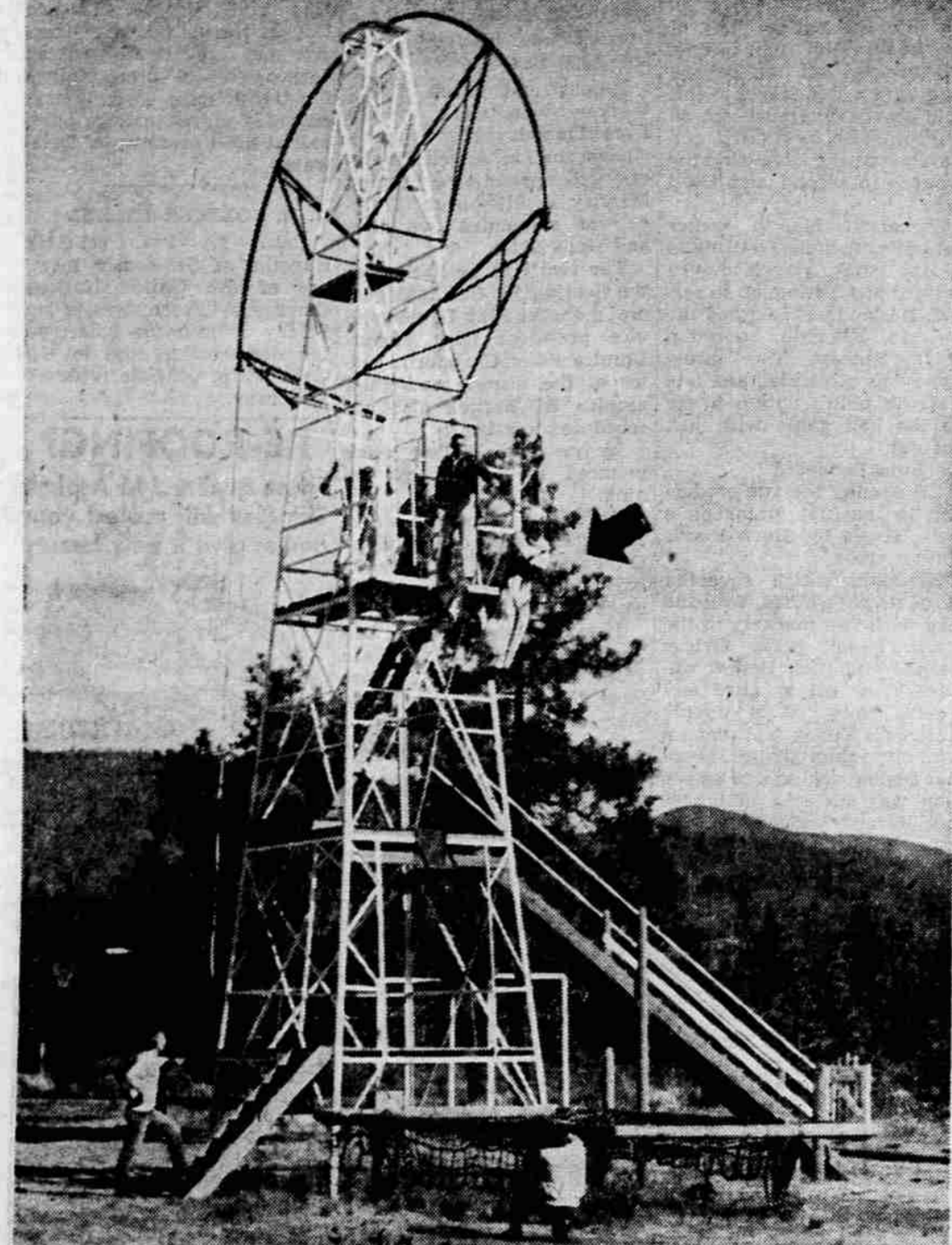


ALL THAT? - Here Norm Pawlowski (center) of Jacksonville looks at the equipment he'll have to pack out on his back when he's through suppressing a fire. Al Boucher (left) and Jim Allen, project air officer, look on sympathetically. Fire pack (standing, under Allen's arm) is dropped individually to jumpers. Its contents are displayed in front of it, resting on disposable paper sleeping bag. Jump suit and coiled let-down rope are at left. Parachute is at Allen's feet and spare chute is in front of it. The twin-engine U. S. forest service plane is behind them. The fire pack gear includes shovel, fire-ax, canteen, protective hat, two-days' rations. When he's not at the jump base Norm is a junior at Southern Oregon college.



HANGING-Four hours of training are given to chute manipulation. Here Norm Pawlowski demonstrates how a jumper can control the direction of his flight by pulling on one of the two guide lines attached to the chute. The large pouch on his right trouser leg contains a 100-foot "let-down" rope, used by jumpers to make a descent if their chute gets caught in a tree.

when their chute gets caught in a tree. They say you'll never know what it feels like to jump until you do it yourself. All you can do is take the word of a smokejumper who looks around while he kneels by the open door of the plane, before he steps out into the void. "It's a wonderful feeling," he says. And it's a wonderful service that this group of finely-tuned young men provide.



GOING DOWN, SIR?-Tower jumps are an important part of a smokejumper's training. Eight hours of tower jumping are given new jumpers and they help separate the men from the boys. When this jumper (arrow) comes to the end of his rope he'll feel approximately the same jolt as when his parachute opens in the air. Pointing, just above him, is Al Boucher, smokejumper foreman.

Canadian Tops In Pole Climbing

Albany-UP - A Canadian speed demon went up and down a 100-foot pole in 46 seconds Friday as a highlight of the opening of the annual Albany Timber Carnival at Timber-Linn Park here. A parade preceded the event. Lanny Sailor of North Surrey, B.C., took first place in the speed-climbing event, one of five in the first round. Loggers from as far as Connecticut and Alaska entered for the championships, which end Monday.

In other action Friday that drew a crowd of about 10,000, Gus Russell, Otis, won the long-chopping by halving a 14-inch log in 53 1/2 seconds. His own world mark is 30.6 seconds.

Kelly Stanley, Kosmos, Wash., placed first in the ax-throwing; Paul Searles, Toutle, Wash., was tops in log-bucking and Jubiel Wickheim of Victoria, B.C., lead others in log-rolling.

OEA Settles For 'Fair Play'

St. Louis, Mo. (UP) - The delegates from Oregon to the National Education association convention here Friday were defeated four times in their attempts to draft a tougher school integration resolution. The session, led by delegates from the South, turned back a total of six attempts to put the association firmly against segregation. Maryland and New York delegations also tried fruitlessly to draft stern resolutions.

The convention finally adopted a watered-down version calling for an approach to the problem in a "spirit of fair play, good will and respect for law."

Sweet Home Cyclist Killed

Sweet Home (UP) - A 10-year-old boy was killed near Sweet Home Friday when he was hit by a car as he rode a bicycle out of a driveway. Killed was Carma Adams, son of Mr. and Mrs. Elmer Adams of Foster. Stanley George Gambetty, 42, Sweet Home, who was driving, said he did not see the boy. Gambetty's 17-year-old son Frank, who was also in the car said he saw the bicyclist but had no time to yell a warning before the collision.



SUITED UP-Wearing all this equipment it's not easy to climb into the plane but you'd probably think it was a lot harder to jump out. The same door serves for both purposes. The parachute straps on the jumper's back and the spare chute over his stomach. Norm Pawlowski is carrying a mobile radio under the spare chute, although it is not visible here. The football-type helmet with fire grid is standard equipment, to protect against head and face injuries.



FIVE O'CLOCK JUMP-Falling feet first from 1,500 feet this smokejumper has just stepped out for his early morning pick-me-up. Or is it let-me-down? At any rate, he's on his way. The only thing keeping him from a sudden stop is his parachute, still unfurling behind him. This was his third training jump. When the chute opens, it will have a 32-foot diameter.