DURING THE WINTER OF 1944-1945, THE WEST COAST of North America was attacked by Japanese free-sailing unmanned balloons carrying either incendiaries or anti-personnel bombs.

More than 9,000 balloons were launched from November 1944 to April 1945 from Japan. The balloons were carried across the Pacific Ocean by wind currents at stratospheric levels and reached the West Coast in 80 to 120 hours. A majority landed on the West Coast including Alaska, Canada, and Mexico; some as far East as Michigan. In all about 1,000 balloons reached North America and of those only 342 were ever sighted or found.

On the balloons an automatic dropping device, controlled by aneroid barometers, was used to cast off the suspended ballast and bomb. Their purpose was to set fires and thereby bolster civilian morale in Japan while lowering morale in America.

Since the Western part of the United States, especially the Northwest contained a highly inflammable cover of timber, brush and grass; any random dropping of incendiary missiles aroused concern with the agencies responsible for the protection and administration of wildlands.

At the time the Forest Service had a significant shortage of men physically qualified to fight fires. The Army offered its assistance in protecting timber, grazing, and watershed resources. And without their help the Forest Service fire control record of 1945 would have been quite different.

A firefighting plan was developed by the Fourth Air Force, Western Defense Command and Ninth Service Command and designated as the Fire Fly Project. It provided for troops specially designated, trained and equipped to suppress forest fires. It further provided for air assistance.

**PROJECT FIRE FLY**

Responding to Japanese Balloon Bombs over North America in 1945

BY NEAL M. RAHM

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**PARATROOPER JUMP RECORD**

- Number of fires upon which troops jumped: 15
- Number of enlisted men committed: 444
- Man-days of fire fighting: 2,145

See FIRE FLY, page 4
SMOKEJUMPERS - This year is the 75th Anniversary of the Forest Service Smokejumper program. In this issue of the newsletter, we’re proud to share some smokejumper history from the museum archives.

NEWSLETTER - We decided the newsletter needed a new appearance after 14 years. Scott Hawk, Communications Director, has designed the new look. We’re always searching for people to write articles on the history of the Forest Service for the newsletter. In a future issue Brian Payne will write about the Forest Service’s work with Tuskegee University. Contact us if you’re interested in contributing.

CAPITAL CAMPAIGN - We continue to work hard on our capital campaign and believe that 2015 will be a key year in helping to ensure its success. We’re pursuing several promising leads for a major donation to anchor our $14.5 million campaign and get us on track for a final push. Through committee work, we have also established a corporate partner program to help provide the resources for a full-time paid executive director and additional annual operating funds.

FOREST SERVICE MOU - A new MOU will be signed soon. The Memorandum of Understanding is scheduled for renewal in 2020.

ADS INCREASE AUDIENCE – We’re testing out advertisements on social media to increase our audience. The investment has paid off with a 41% increase in followers. Overall, social media advertising has reached 12,000 people on Facebook and 21,000 people on Twitter. A photo of a vintage Smokey Bear poster drew the greatest response.

PORTLAND AREA ORAL HISTORY PROJECT - The Mount St. Helens Institute (MSHI) will be interviewing Forest Service Retirees in the Pacific Northwest starting with the Gifford Pinchot National Forest, for an oral history project. A $1,860 grant from the Old Smokeys Forest Service Retirees Association will be used for software and an analog audio to digital audio conversion device. The edited digital files of the interviews will be sent to the museum for archiving and will be available for access on the museum’s website.

Phil Dodd is coordinating the project.

TED SCHLAPFER FOUNDATION - Over 40 years ago, Ted Schlapfer started a program at Lewis and Clark College in Portland, Oregon called the Executive Seminar Program (ESP). It’s prospered over the years becoming substantial contributor toward inter-agency education and networking on critical issues regarding natural resources. The seminar program is now under the stewardship of Portland State University and the goal is to create a foundation in order to support the ESP in perpetuity. If you are interested in supporting the Ted Schlapfer Foundation, please contact Richard Jung at Portland State University at (503) 725-2997 or email rjung@pdx.edu.

NEW BOOK – A Job with Room & Board: Memories of an Early Montana Forestester is a memoir from John B. Taylor about his time with the U.S. Forest Service from 1907-1950. When he was 18-years-old, he took his first job on a mapping and timber cruising crew in Swan River Valley, Montana. Later, he was a Forest Supervisor Region 1 and Personnel Officer Region 9. The museum has an archive copy of Taylor’s 204 page oral history transcript (2012.49). The book is available from the publisher, Mountain Press, for $12.00. Visit www.mountain-press.com.

CLASSIC SMOKEY “Hey Come Back, You Forgot Something!” Poster from the 1990s. (USFS)
Bungalow Cabin Displays Open
July 17-18, 2015
10 AM to 2 PM

The bungalow cabin will be open to the public during the 75th Anniversary Smokejumper Reunion this summer. Entrance is free and open to the public.

Historic photographs and artifacts will be on display including a 1949 wedding dress stitched from a silk parachute for a smokejumper’s wedding.

The bungalow cabin is located 1-mile west of the Missoula Airport on Highway 10 West.

Volunteers are needed to welcome visitors to the bungalow. If you would like to help, please contact Dave Stack at (406) 541-6374 to volunteer.
in two forms: reconnaissance planes and personnel to detect fires, transport planes to carry paratroopers to remote inaccessible fires and to bring supplies to fire fighters; and to transport ground troops when feasible. The Forest Service was the lead Federal agency and responsible for coordinating with the Army.

ARMY RESOURCES COMMITTED

GROUND TROOPS: On May 19, 1945 authorization was granted for organizing the 317lst Engineering Fire Fighting Battalion (Prov.) consisting of a battalion headquarters and ten fire fighting companies organized and equipped per agreement of mutual understanding. The units were located in Regions 1, 4, 5 and 6. General locations were determined by the degree of existing potential fire hazard. Ten companies were assigned. Company Strength: 269 enlisted and 4 officers. Locations: California: Chico, Santa Rosa, Riverside; Idaho: Boise; Montana: Missoula; Oregon: Medford, Portland and Washington: Spokane, (2 companies), McChord Field (Tacoma area).

PARATROOPERS: On May 3, 1945 the 555th Infantry Parachute Battalion (The Triple Nickles) was ordered to fire duty to be stationed at Pendleton, Oregon, with a detachment at Chico, California. The 1st Troop Carrier Command was assigned the duty of transporting paratroops, ground forces, Forest Service supervisory personnel and cargo. The 161st Liaison Squadron was to furnish L-5 type aircraft and pilots for fire detection, patrol flights and scouting fires.

PARATROOPER LOCATIONS: 555th Parachute Battalion - 200 enlisted men at Pendleton, Oregon and 100 enlisted men at Chico, California.

AIR ASSISTANCE: 1st Troop Carrier Command: 4 - C-47 Walla Walla, WA, 2 - C-47 Chico, CA and 1 - C-47 Hamilton Field, (Novoto) CA. 161st Liaison Squadron: 8 L-5 airplanes assigned to each base: Portland, Spokane, Boise, and Chico; plus one C-64 at each base.

WHERE JAPANESE BALLOONS WERE FOUND

Recoveries were made in 17 states in these general areas.

TRAINING BY FIELD AGENCIES

GROUND TROOPS: The intensive nine-day training program developed at the inter-regional conference of fire control officers was used. The local Forest Service liaison officer was responsible for training all section and platoon leaders, and all enlisted men for a minimum of 16-hours of basic instruction in the fundamentals of fire behavior, line location, use of tools and line construction. The value of the preseason intensive training program was nullified when the original engineering troops were replaced in July by Air Corps personnel. The latter group did not receive this training; consequently their effectiveness on the fire line was noticeably lowered.

PARATROOPERS: The training of the 555th Infantry Parachute Battalion was essentially the same as ground troops with the addition of a course in “smoke jumping.” The training provided was similar to that given regular Forest Service smoke jumpers. The principal difficulty...
in training the troops was weaning them away from Army methods, which were not always adapted to the same conditions. There appeared to be a tendency to disregard civilian instruction. It was strongly recommended that paratroopers for fire duty be given more training in jumping in mountainous country.

**FIRE CONTROL OPERATIONS**

During the first part of July, fire situations developed in California, Oregon and Washington exhausting Fire Fly facilities in the Regions 5 and 6. Army and Navy personnel from other bases were drawn on to meet emergency conditions and to supplement the Fire Fly effort.

**JULY:** Serious fire situations developed in Northern and Southern California, Washington, Oregon and Idaho. At one time all Fire Fly facilities in Regions 5 and 6 were near exhaustion.

**AUGUST:** Two bad situations developed in Northern California because of lightning storms. Three large fires on August 20 gave Region 1 trouble; all available Fire Fly personnel were committed. Region 4 had a serious situation after the 15th.

**SEPTEMBER:** Region 5 experienced high winds and low humidity. Previously quiet fires fanned to new heights with additional “starts” on both Forest Service and State protected lands. Military assistance was heavily utilized.

**OCTOBER:** Critical situations developed in Northern, Central and Southern California. The Fire Fly Company strength was so depleted by discharge that they gave little assistance in meeting suppression problems. Army, Navy and Marine personnel from regular bases supplied the urgently needed manpower.

**EFFECTIVENESS OF ARMY UNITS**

**GROUND TROOPS:** The physical condition and morale of the original battalion of engineers was fair at the start. Most were returned veterans and many suffered from battle wounds and disease. However, following their initial training and the first fires, their physical condition improved and morale was considered good. By the middle of July the original battalion was replaced by Air Corps personnel. The replacements were younger and in better physical condition, but their morale was so low it nullified any advantages in age.

**REASONS FOR LOW MORALE:** The personnel were almost all Technical Sergeants and no normal balance in rank existed. Men lacked working unity and were drawn from many outfits and different theaters of war. Some high point veterans were waiting discharge. Troops lacked respect for the engineering officer under whom they were assigned and morale in all the branches dropped after V-J Day.

**PARATROOPERS:** In California the African-American paratroopers, both officers and men, were considered superior in morale, physical condition, efficiency and officer leadership to the white troops. Forests using them could not speak more highly of their services and in some cases maintained that the unit was superior to any trained group they had ever used. The officers were interested and cooperative, maintained fine discipline and were out on the line with their men every minute. Effectiveness on the few fires in Region 5, where jumps were made, was hampered by injuries; however several fires that could have been disastrous were caught small.

**GENERAL PROBLEMS:** Jump masters were unfamiliar with mountainous and timbered country and were unable to properly judge safe landings. Principal Army training had been on flat terrain and boys were timid when jumping in mountainous country. They needed practice jumps in mountainous areas and had a lack of confidence in the Derry Chute.

**CONCLUSION**

The Fire Fly Project with its joint control by several branches of the Army and the Forest Service, all working together toward a common objective, was a unique period in Forest Service history. The coordination and cooperation required to make the project function was remarkably good.

**AUTHOR NEAL M. RAHM**

As the Forest Service Project Fire Fly Liaison, Rahm prepared the final project report, dated January 31, 1946 (NMFSH catalog no. 2015.11.13). He joined the Forest Service in 1937 after graduating from the University of California. He served as ranger, forest supervisor, and Associate Deputy Chief of the Forest Service before being assigned in 1964 as Regional Forester, Northern Region. Rahm retired in 1971.
MacLean describes the work of early forest rangers and their families as Montana’s National Forest Ranger Stations, east of the Continental Divide, were established then changed over time. Information collected from the U.S. Forest Service archives and individuals. 140 pages. $20 plus $3.00 S&H.

MUSEUM SITE

VOLUNTEER NEEDED

We’re seeking one volunteer to mow the grass at the Bungalow Cabin and check on the irrigation system operation. Estimated time -- 2 hours per week during the summer. Please contact Dave Stack (406) 541-6374 to volunteer.
Home on the Range: Montana’s Westside Ranger Stations
By Vicky MacLean

MacLean describes the work of early forest rangers and their families as Montana’s National Forest Ranger Stations, west of the Continental Divide, were established then changed over time. Information collected from the U.S. Forest Service archives and individuals. 142 pages. $20 plus $3.00 S&H.

MUSEUM REPOSITORY

Smokejumpers meet under the wing of a Travel Air airplane at Hale Field in Missoula, Montana in 1941. (left to right) Jim Waite (sitting on wheel), Johnson Flying Service pilot Slim Phillips, Bill Martin, Johnson Flying Service owner Bob Johnson (with visor), Frank “Chet” Derry (jacket), and Francis Lufkin (kneeling).

Smokejumpers Earl Cooley (left) and James Alexander (right) gear up with the help of other men in Seeley Lake, Montana in 1941.

Smokejumper Beer was created for the 50th Anniversary of the smokejumpers program, 1940-1990.

Ninemile Jumper Group sitting on the steps of the Ninemile Ranger Station in Huson, Montana in 1941. (left to right) Back row: Roy Abbott, George Honey, Jim Alexander. (left to right) Front row: Francis Lufkin, Chet Derry, Fred Bauer and Rusty Mainwaring.

This SF Radiophone Model B-2 was manufactured by Radio Specialty Manufacturing Company in 1948. The radiophone included a 7-foot collapsible antenna for transmission.

This fire weather kit from 1962 was used by weather observers on wildland fires. The kit includes a psychrometer, pencils, water bottle, wind meter, notebook, relative humidity table and writing board. It was manufactured by Western Fire Equipment Company.

HOW TO ORDER
Send a check along with your order to:
National Museum of Forest Service History
P.O. Box 2772
Missoula, Montana 59806-2772
or visit www.forestservicemuseum.org/store
MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Become a member of the National Museum of Forest Service History and help us preserve the history of the U.S. Forest Service. Fill out, detach and mail this form to P.O. Box 2772, Missoula, Montana 59806-2772.

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