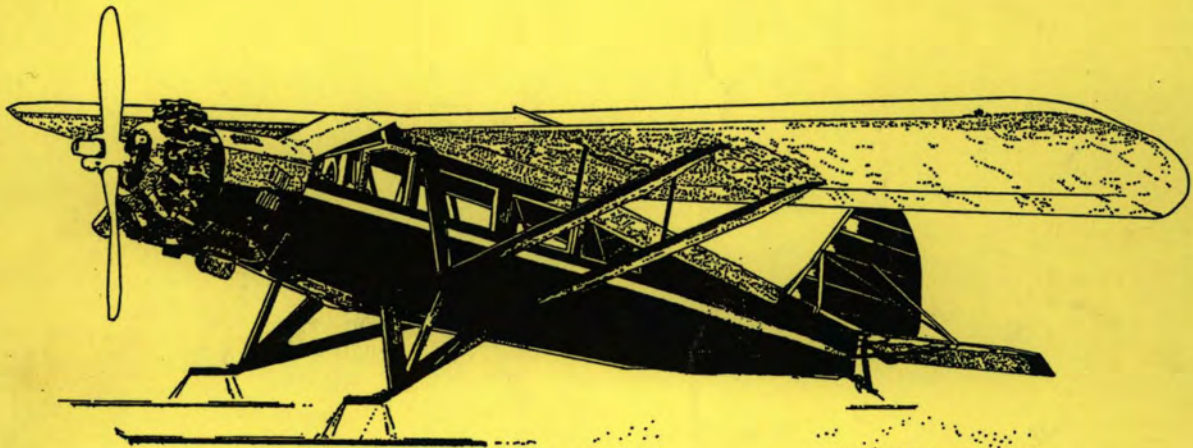


AVIATION HISTORY OF THE CENTRAL IDAHO WILDERNESS

**by Jim Larkin, Bud Filler, and Others
Edited by Peter Preston**



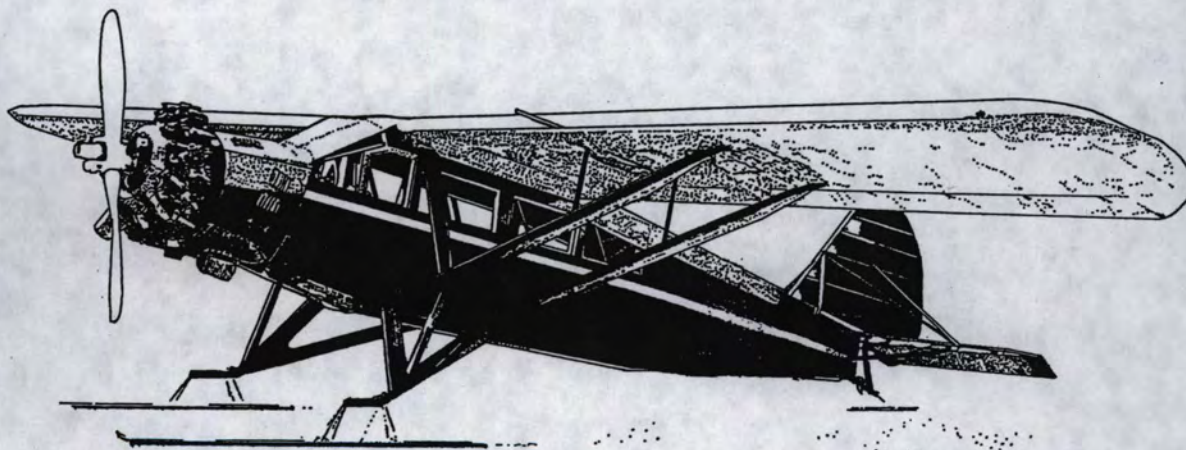
SKI-EQUIPPED TRAVELAIR, EARLY WILDERNESS AIRCRAFT

**HERITAGE PROGRAM, PAYETTE NATIONAL FOREST
FOREST SERVICE, INTERMOUNTAIN REGION
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE**

MAY 2003

AVIATION HISTORY OF THE CENTRAL IDAHO WILDERNESS

**by Jim Larkin, Bud Filler, and Others
Edited by Peter Preston**



SKI-EQUIPPED TRAVELAIR, EARLY WILDERNESS AIRCRAFT

**HERITAGE PROGRAM, PAYETTE NATIONAL FOREST
FOREST SERVICE, INTERMOUNTAIN REGION
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE**

MAY 2003

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	iii
Chapter 1 - Nick Mamer, Grandfather of Wilderness Aviation	1
Chapter 2 - Johnson Flying Service, Backcountry Pioneer	4
Chapter 3 - Aerial Ambulance Called to Big Creek	7
Chapter 4 - First Use of Aircraft for Fire Control Support	10
Chapter 5 - Air Transportation in Fire Control	13
Chapter 6 - Winged Freighters	17
Chapter 7 - Emergency Rescue on the 1935 National Geographic Society's Salmon River Expedition	20
Chapter 8 - Loon Lake B-23 Rescue	22
Chapter 9 - Search for the Downed	29
Chapter 10 - A History of Forest Service Air Operations	33
Chapter 11 - The Planes and Their Pilots	41
Chapter 12 - The Salmon River Run	47
Chapter 13 - Bill Dorris and McCall Air Taxi	59
Chapter 14 - Jim Larkin, Backcountry Pilot	64
Chapter 15 - Waiting for the Mail at Big Creek	67
Appendix 1 - Wilderness Airstrips: Listing and Notes	70
References Cited	80

INTRODUCTION

by Peter Preston

The central Idaho wilderness is the largest "wilderness" in the United States outside of Alaska. This wilderness extends into the Clearwater and Bitterroot Mountains north of the Salmon River, and into the headwaters of the South Fork and Middle Fork of the Salmon River. Most of the area is within the National Forest System, covering parts of several national forests. The area has a resident population of a few hundred people, and is characterized by rugged mountains and severe winters, closing the few roads which enter the area. Within the larger central Idaho wilderness are three contiguous federally-designated Wilderness Areas: Frank Church - River of No Return, Selway - Bitterroot, and Gospel Hump. These federally-designated Wilderness Areas are roadless and have a resident population of only a handful of people at the few rustic lodges in the area.

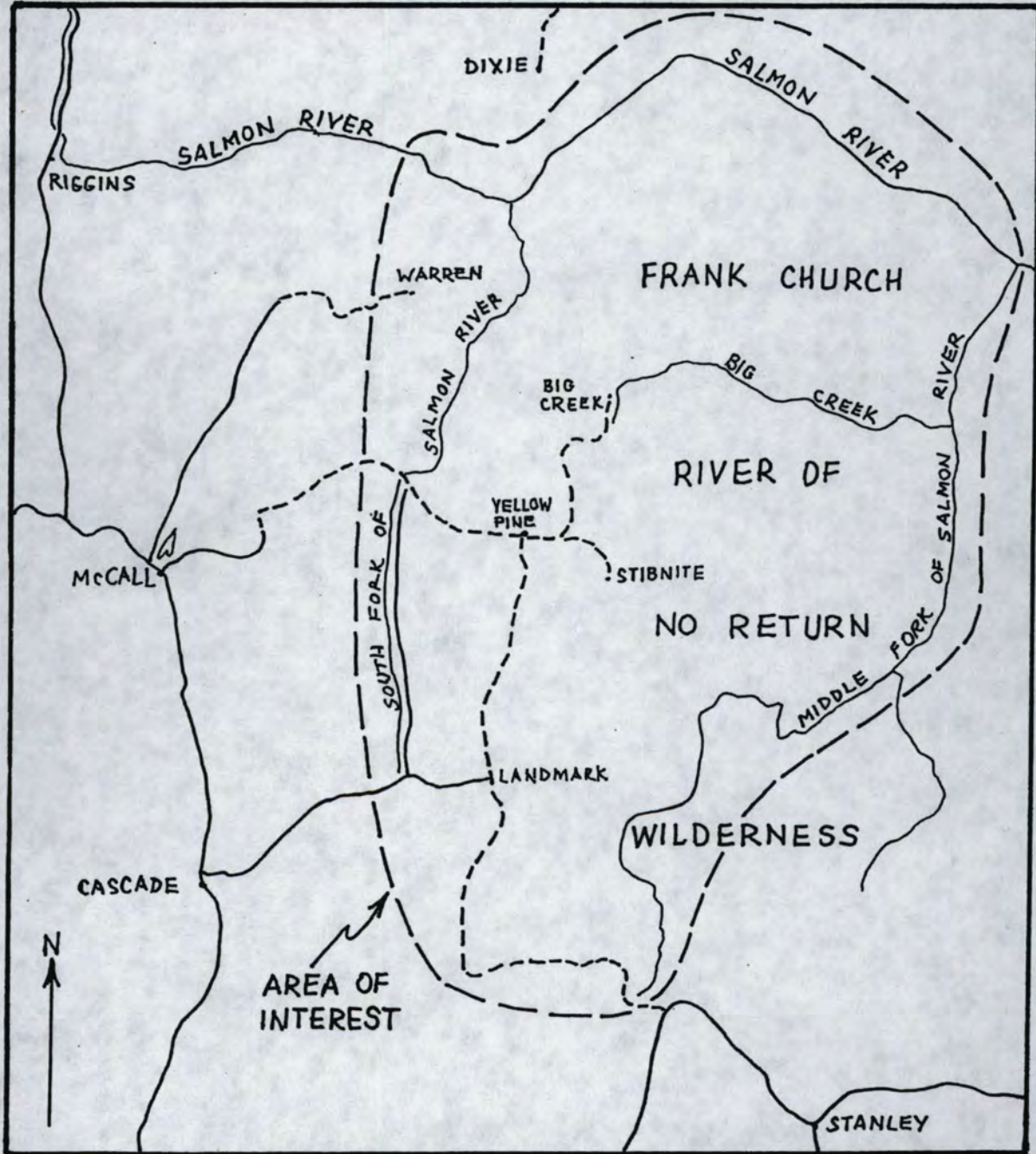
The focus of this Aviation History of the Central Idaho Wilderness is a slightly smaller area than that described above. The area, illustrated on the map on the following page, is bounded on the north by the main Salmon River, on the east by the Middle Fork of the Salmon, on the west by the South Fork of the Salmon, on the south by the Valley County line. The area is mostly within the Payette National Forest, and a portion within the Boise National Forest, with most of the area a part of the Frank Church - River of No Return Wilderness. Within this area are a few small, scattered private ownerships.

The area has a fascinating history beginning with the discovery of gold at Warren in 1862. Warren became the jumping-off place for mineral prospecting in the far interior, which led to the Thunder Mountain gold rush of 1900. The Thunder Mountain gold rush led to the establishment of small "ranches" in low elevation spots in the area to raise livestock and fruit to feed the miners. The Thunder Mountain gold boom fizzled by 1910, but the small ranches persisted, a number of them later being turned into big game hunting lodges.

The Age of Aviation dramatically changed the transportation opportunities within this basically roadless wilderness. Aerial fire patrols began in northern Idaho and western Montana in 1925. By 1928 the first airplane landed in the wilderness, bringing hunters to the Stonebraker Ranch in Chamberlain Basin. In 1929, an airstrip was built at the Stibnite Mine to ferry supplies in the winter with ski-equipped planes, operating from a pasture landing field east of Cascade. In 1930 the U.S Post Office Department established contract aerial mail delivery to remote mining camps. As an adjunct to mail delivery, the planes also carried passengers and freight. The Forest Service had been contemplating the use of aircraft for fire control logistics when the great Chamberlain Basin fire of 1931 brought that idea to reality.

Within the span of a few short years, aircraft became an accepted mode of transportation in the roadless backcountry. By the mid-1930s, more landing strips were established at Forest Service sites and privately-owned camps. Adventurous pilots learned how to use the smallest meadows, pastures, and river bars as their landing fields.

The Forest Service came to rely on air transportation for supplying backcountry outposts and, in the early 1930s, successfully developed the techniques for parachuting supplies to fire crews. The Ford Tri-motor became the workhorse of wilderness aviation. In 1943 a Forest Service smokejumper unit was established at McCall which began the era of rapid control of fires in the wilderness. By 1954 the U.S. Post Office Department had extended aerial mail delivery to all occupied sites in the backcountry that had an airstrip, including winter delivery with ski-equipped planes. This is the story of those daring wilderness pilots and their airplanes, a unique chapter in American history.



AVIATION HISTORY OF CENTRAL IDAHO WILDERNESS AREA OF INTEREST

CHAPTER 1
NICK MAMER, GRANDFATHER OF WILDERNESS AVIATION
by Peter Preston



NICK MAMER, 1929 (Frank Wiley Collection)

Nicholas B. Mamer was an aviator during World War I, who, like many early aviators, loved flying and also saw the possibilities of developing commercial aviation as a business enterprise. He settled in Spokane and continued his military connection as a reserve lieutenant with the 116th Observation Squadron (U.S. Army Air Corps) of the Washington National Guard, formed at Spokane's Felts Field in 1924. In 1925, the squadron received three new Consolidated O-17s to add to their Douglas O-2H and DeHavilland observation aircraft of WW I vintage. The O-17s arrived in major pieces in crates and had to be assembled by the squadron personnel. In the mid-1920s military aviation, especially at the National Guard level, was poorly funded. Being the entrepreneur that he was, Nick Mamer went looking for a job to keep the squadron (and himself) flying.

Mamer and Forest Service Inspector Howard R. Flint, from the Region 1 office at Missoula, got together in 1925 and formed a plan for an aerial forest fire patrol, working out of Spokane. The plan was based upon a cooperative experiment between the Forest Service and the Army Air Corps in California in 1919, which was successful but died from lack of funding. Lt. Mamer and his squadron-mate, Lt. R. F. Freng, began flying forest fire patrol in the northern Rocky Mountains in 1925. Freng did such work only for one year, but Mamer continued and became inseparably connected with Howard Flint in the development of Forest Service applications of aerial fire control support. (Larkin, c1967:1).

In the summer of 1925, Nick Mamer had been ferrying Idaho State Forester Ben Bush on an aerial survey of Idaho forests, and Bush asked Mamer to speak at the Boise Rotary Club. On August 20, 1925, Mamer spoke to the Rotary Club, telling the members that Boise urgently needed a good airport if it wanted to be considered for future use by the Army Air Corps and other fliers, citing the city of Spokane developing Felts Field for commercial use in 1924. Soon following, in September, squadron-mate Freng took C.A. Barton, member of the Idaho State Forestry Board and General Manager of Boise-Payette Lumber Company, on an extended flight over Idaho's forest lands, followed by Governor C. C. Moore and other members of the Forestry Board, looking at the feasibility of aerial fire patrol, but also looking at how roads might be built to remote timber stands (Hart 1991:55).

Concurrent with his part-time National Guard job, Mamer established Nick Mamer Flying Service, which was principally financed by Spokane businessman and sportsman Clarence Paulsen. Nick Mamer Flying Service included charter air service, flying instruction, and dealership for Swallow, Buhl, and Travelair aircraft. In his role as flying instructor, Mamer taught Bob Johnson to fly, as well as many others, including his benefactor Clarence Paulsen. By 1927, Johnson was flying fire patrol in western Montana from Missoula (see more on Johnson in Chapter 2).

In his patrolling of the mountains of Idaho and western Montana, Nick Mamer became intimately familiar with the landscape and potential emergency landing places. One such place was the isolated ranch of Al Stonebraker in Chamberlain Basin, in what is now the Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness. It is probable that he landed to test the ground at the Stonebraker ranch while on patrol in the summer of 1928. In mid-October 1928, Mamer and Paulsen took two big game hunters from Grangeville to the Stonebraker ranch where Al Stonebraker then became their hunting guide. (Lewiston Tribune, October 13, 1928). This was the first recorded instance of aircraft landing in the Idaho wilderness, which was repeated by Mamer numbers of times over the next few years, establishing a close relationship between Mamer and Al Stonebraker. Mamer was known to have landed the National Guard Consolidated O-17 at the Stonebraker place while on patrol, but used his personal Boeing Stearman (and probably other aircraft) for transporting hunters. As a result of Mamer's landings at the Stonebraker ranch, Al Stonebraker's youngest brother George became enamored with flying (see more on George Stonebraker in chapter 2).

Nick Mamer took every opportunity to promote public awareness of aircraft uses and capabilities, such as an air show at the Lewiston-Clarkston airport on October 20-21,

1928, during which the 116th Observation Squadron did demonstrations along with privately-owned aircraft. Mamer lost a race with a Curtiss Robin, but won the dead-stick landing contest with his Stearman (Lewiston Tribune, October 22, 1928). On Wednesday, October 24, following the weekend air show, Mamer made national news by flying 1500 miles non-stop from Spokane to St. Paul, Minnesota, in a multi-wing Buhl airplane, promoting the establishment of a commercial air route which later became that of Northwest Airlines (Lewiston Tribune, October 25, 1928). In 1930 Mamer and copilot Art Walker established a record by flying non-stop 7200 miles from Spokane, to San Francisco, to New York, and back to Spokane in the first demonstration of aerial refueling. Early in the flight the refueling hose was cut by the propeller, but the flight was successfully completed by lowering gas cans on a rope (Spokane Spokesman-Review, June 21, 1997).

Although Nick Mamer was engaged in a number of promotional activities, he continued his close connection with the Forest Service. He was one of the principal pilots during the 1931 great fire in Chamberlain Basin (see more in Chapter 4). Mamer formed a partnership with Roy Shreck, called the Mamer-Shreck Air Service, operating out of Felts Field at Spokane; however, the Great Depression of the early 1930s caused the company to fail. Nick Mamer then signed on as a pilot for Northwest Airlines. At age 39, Nick was killed when the Lockheed Electra he was piloting broke up in flight in 1938, near Bozeman, Montana. (W. Stonebraker, pers.comm., Dec 17, 2002).

CHAPTER 2 JOHNSON FLYING SERVICE, BACKCOUNTRY PIONEER

by Peter Preston

Bob Johnson (1893-1980) was the most well known of the several aviation pioneers of the northern Rocky Mountain wilderness, best known as the founder of Johnson Flying Service with operating locations in Missoula and McCall. In the spring of 1924 Bob Johnson was operating a service station in Missoula; as did many young men of that era, he wanted to fly. Having heard about the Washington National Guard aviation squadron being stationed at Spokane, Bob went to Spokane seeking flying instruction. It was there he met Nick Mamer who taught him to fly. Nick was a flying officer of the National Guard unit and was the general manager of Nick Mamer Flying Service. Working for Mamer at that time was Penn Stohr, who would later become one of the principal pilots of Johnson Flying Service (Place & Florek, 1953:53).

In March of 1927, Bob Johnson bought from Mamer a new Swallow airplane, powered by a 90-horsepower Curtiss OX-5 engine. Mamer and Johnson flew it from Spokane to Missoula (Smith 1988:36-37). With the Swallow, Johnson joined the ranks of Mamer and several others as airborne forest fire spotters in north Idaho and western Montana, under contract with the Forest Service, operating from Missoula. Johnson did well with the Forest Service and saw that aviation support had a future. Johnson took all his resources, and that of a few investors, and on April 20, 1929, purchased from Mamer a Travelair 6000 (Tail Number NC 6879), powered by a 300-horsepower Wright "Whirlwind" J6 engine. The plane had a range of 500 miles, had a top speed of 102 mph, and would stay airborne at 55 mph. The new Travelair, with a green fuselage and orange wings, was Bob's pride and joy. He named her "Mae Gerard" after one of his investors and had wooden skis made for the aircraft for winter landings on snow-covered airstrips. (Place & Florek, 1953:14-20). [Current aircraft are fitted with retractable skis so planes can land on dry runways with wheels as well as snow covered runways with skis].

In the late winter of 1929-1930, Johnson established operations at Boise, carrying mail and freight to mining operations in southwest Idaho in a subcontract for A.A. Bennett who had more work than he could handle. Bennett had earlier worked with Johnson in Missoula (Place & Florek, 1953:29). Bennett later purchased the Crandall ranch on the Middle Fork of the Salmon, built an airstrip for fly-in sportsmen, and named it the Flying B Ranch (Carrey 1977). [A. A. Bennett (1885-1970) was Director of the Civil Air Patrol in southern Idaho in 1943, as noted in Chapter 9, and Idaho State Director of Aeronautics 1944-45].

In late 1930, Johnson received a letter from the Forest Service regional office in Missoula, indicating the Forest Service "was studying the possibilities of opening one or more airstrips in the backcountry, so that fire fighting crews could be stationed in the hinterland during the fire season and transported and supplied by air... If we were to clear such a strip, would you attempt a landing? It could mean a contract." Of course Johnson jumped at the opportunity and showed the Forest Service that landing on a

wilderness airstrip [Moose Creek] with a loaded Ford tri-motor could be done. The Forest Service was convinced that aviation support for fire suppression was the wave of the future. "From 1931 to 1934, the Johnson boys and the Forest Service grew up together." (Place & Florek, 1953:33,46) In late July of 1931, the resources of Johnson Flying Service, as well as others, was brought to bear on supporting Forest Service logistics for the great Chamberlain Basin fire. It was a result of this fire that the Idaho National Forest (which was incorporated into the current Payette National Forest in 1944) and Johnson Flying Service came to know one another in a relationship that lasted many years.

In related events, George Stonebraker had been taught to fly by Gordon Moore in 1930 at the Cascade Airport. [Gordon Moore made the first landing at the Big Creek airstrip in 1933 and subsequently became a long-term pilot for Northwest Airlines] (W. Stonebraker, pers.comm., Dec 17, 2002). George Stonebraker became an accomplished pilot and secured the Yellow Pine-Stibnite mail contract in 1930, along with hauling freight from Cascade. He bought a Bellanca aircraft in 1930, and hired Ray Fisher to fly the mail run. Fisher was killed on January 12, 1931, when the Bellanca crashed on West Mountain, southwest of McCall, while he was looking for Louis Coski's snowbound cattle. With Fisher's death, "Wild Bill" Haddock, of Boise, took over aerial mail delivery as a sub-contractor to Stonebraker, with pilots Bill Gowen and Paul McKinley doing the flying [Fisher had worked for Haddock prior to Stonebraker]. In late January 1931, Stonebraker bought a new Travelair 6000 to replace the crashed Bellanca. (Hart 1991:56-57).

In the late summer of 1931, Bennett Air Transport won the mail contract previously held by George Stonebraker, plus the air mail contract Bennett already had for the Boise area. Bennett again had more work than he could do, so he subcontracted some of the work to Bob Johnson. Collectively, Bennett and Johnson had three planes serving the area: to Atlanta from Boise; and from Cascade and McCall to Stibnite, Warren, Yellow Pine, Deadwood, Chamberlain, and Knox. The pilots were Bennett, Chick Walker, Bob King, and Bob Johnson. (Idaho Sunday Statesman, May 8, 1932). With the experience of subcontracting aerial mail delivery in southwest Idaho, in the late summer of 1932 Johnson won the air mail contracts previously held by Bennett Air Transport. To support his Idaho operation Johnson bought a hangar at Cascade in 1932. At that time, the airfield was a pasture on the south side of the Warm Lake road, across from the Crawford School, three miles east of Cascade. Penn Stohr's father lived at the airfield, loading and unloading planes, and making and repairing skis for the planes. (Petersen 2002:110-111).

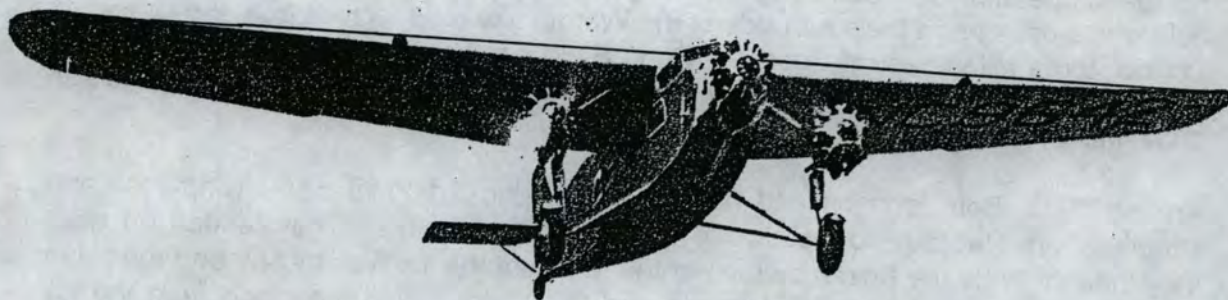
Around 1935, Bob Johnson and his chief mechanic Art Pritzl were flying mail and supplies from Cascade to Deadwood Reservoir in mid-winter. They landed on what they thought to be the frozen surface of the lake, but the ice was mushy and the "Mae Gerard" sank up to her wings. Johnson and Pritzl later pulled the plane from the icy water and were using a small heater to melt the ice on the control cables. The plane caught fire and exploded, leaving only a charred skeleton of Johnson's favorite airplane (Place & Florek, 1953:50-53). The destroyed "Mae Gerard" was soon replaced by another Travelair 6000 (Serial 839), with tail number NC-9038. About the only difference was that 9038 had a black fuselage, instead of green, but had orange wings like

"Mae Gerard." The orange and black Travelair, depicted on the front cover, was a familiar sight at the McCall airport and at backcountry airstrips for over 20 years.

In the early 1930s, Johnson Flying Service began buying Ford trimotors that were being retired from use by airlines. The Fords were well suited to the backcountry work, as they could carry heavy loads and could be used on short, unimproved airstrips. In 1940 Johnson bought Tom McCall's flying business and facilities at McCall airport. Tom then moved permanently to the Middle Fork Lodge, which he had purchased in 1938, on the Middle Fork of the Salmon, which he further developed as a fly-in hunting and fishing lodge (Carrey 1977). [Tom McCall was the grandson of the Tom McCall for whom the town is named].

As the volume of work increased with the Forest Service in the McCall area, especially the establishment of a smokejumper unit in McCall, Johnson Flying Service moved its primary base of operations in Idaho to McCall in 1943 and ended its operation at Cascade in 1945. Bob Fogg (1919-1979) moved from Cascade to be Johnson's operations manager at McCall. Bob had earlier learned to fly when working for Johnson Flying Service in Missoula.

For over thirty years Johnson Flying Service was the major presence at the McCall Airport, the major contractor for the Forest Service, the U.S. Postal Service, and backcountry miners, ranchers and outfitters. The Ford Tri-Motor and the Travelair were the principal work horses, transporting all manner of cargo in addition to passengers, mail, and boxes of groceries. Some of the freight items included gasoline and diesel fuel in cans and barrels, structural steel, mining machinery and equipment, construction equipment, bridge timbers, lumber, building materials, cement, small tractors, chickens and livestock, wolves for relocation, etc. In one instance, cable for a suspension bridge was not flexible enough to be coiled inside a Ford, so it was wrapped around the outside of the fuselage for transport to the bridge site. You name it, they hauled it!



JOHNSON FLYING SERVICE FORD TRI-MOTOR, NC-9642
(Photo from Steve Smith's [Fly the Biggest Piece Back](#))

STORY OF LOCAL INTEREST
"The Forest Service Cave"

CHAPTER 3
AERIAL AMBULANCE CALLED TO BIG CREEK

by Peter Preston

In the second week of May 1931, Big Creek-Chamberlain District Ranger Dan LeVan had his trail crew working on the lower Big Creek trail. The crew was working at a point opposite Breeching Creek, in the vicinity of the Dave Lewis place (now the University of Idaho Taylor Ranch Field Station). The crew's task was to widen, and reroute as necessary, the existing ancient foot-path along Big Creek to meet Forest Service trail standards to accommodate loaded pack animals. At this location on the trail a rock outcrop led the crew to begin driving a tunnel through the rock rather than switchback up and around the rock.

The trail crew consisted of Routson brothers Emmit and Noel, who had grown up at their parents' wilderness ranch several miles upstream on Big Creek, John Reeder, Earle Harper, and Don Park [25 years later, Don Park became the author's father-in-law]. The crew was blasting the tunnel through the rock and had progressed about 25 feet. Noel Routson went in the tunnel to remove the loose rock from the floor. As Noel bent over, a large section of the ceiling of the tunnel fell on him, a piece as large as 200 pounds striking him on the back and smaller pieces hitting his head. The other members of the crew came quickly to Noel's aid, bearing him to the crew camp on a hastily-improvised stretcher.

It was obvious that Noel was badly injured. He had a bad laceration on his temple that needed suturing, but all the crew could do was bandage it. When Noel regained consciousness it was found that he was paralyzed from the hips down. It was apparent that he had a serious back injury that needed immediate medical attention. It would have taken several days to move him to civilization by trail and with the probability of further injury to his back. So Ranger LeVan and his crew developed a plan to move Noel by aircraft. In 1931 aircraft travel was still a novelty and aircraft operation in the Idaho wilderness was in its infancy (Parke 1955: 60-61).

To start the plan in motion, John Reeder crossed over to the south side of Big Creek on the cable tram that had been earlier installed by Earle Harper near Dave Lewis's place. Reeder borrowed one of Dave's horses named "Shorty" and rode up to the mouth of Rush Creek where Big Creek is wide but not deep, and crossed back to the Big Creek trail on the north side. Reeder rode quickly to the nearest telephone at Blackie Wallace's ranch on Cabin Creek. (Wallace's ranch was that of the Caswell brothers in the Thunder Mountain gold rush era). In 1931, the telephone network installed by the Forest Service consisted of open wire lines hung on trees along the trails, connecting fire lookouts and other places of habitation, primarily for fire reporting. It was common practice for all "subscribers" on a trunk line to listen in to see what was going on and to be able to assist in emergencies; and so it was in this instance. From Blackie Wallace's place, John Reeder telephoned Forest Service District Headquarters at Big Creek, some thirty miles distant by trail. The call was answered by fire dispatcher Harold "Slim"

Vassar who quickly sized up the problem and called for an aerial ambulance (R.G. Routson 1995: pers. comm.). Pioneer aviator William "Bill" Gowen responded to the call, saying that he would come in from Cascade with the seats removed from his Travelair. Gowen was flying for "Wild Bill" Haddock who was a backcountry mail contractor (Hart 1991:58)

Having arranged for the plane, Slim Vassar then called the Routson's Werdenhoff Mine where there was a crew working under the direction of Jim Hornberger. Slim asked the miners to go down to Cabin Creek (about 30 miles) to make an emergency landing strip out of the Wallace pasture on Big Creek which was "scarcely large enough to pasture a score of cattle." By early the next morning the Werdenhoff miners had made a landing strip out of the pasture by removing rocks and other debris (Idaho Daily Statesman, May 16, 1931).

John Reeder returned to the trail crew camp to report that the rescue plan was in motion and to assist the other crew members in moving Noel by stretcher the seven miles up to the makeshift airstrip. The five men changed off two at a time carrying the stretcher, arriving there the next morning soon after the plane had landed. Noel's oldest brother, John Routson Jr., had flown in with pilot Bill Gowen to act as Bill's navigator in the steep-walled canyon of Big Creek. John Jr. later remarked that the landing and takeoff were extremely difficult, and only because of Bill's skill and sheer, cool nerve were they able to negotiate them (Parke 1955: 60-61).

Noel's sister, Adelia Routson Parke, later wrote that, upon takeoff "never was a plane watched with more anxiety as it made its laborious way up the Big Creek canyon! Mattie [Charles] Mahan, grizzled old miner atop Ramey Ridge, was the first to sight it and he called Headquarters to tell them the plane was passing below [his vantage point]." Mattie, who had no knowledge of the mechanics of aircraft flight, is reported to have said that the plane was "jest barely flappin' its wings." Adelia went on to say, "There was a bit of truth in this remark, for the little craft was struggling for every foot of altitude. John Jr. said he thought they would never rise above the canyon walls." (Parke 1955: 60-61).

They did make it safely to Cascade, where the plane was met by Noel's parents, Lettie and John Routson Sr., who had driven from Weiser with concern for their son and to bolster his morale. John Jr. left the plane at Cascade; Dr. Don Numbers of McCall, a veteran of a number of backcountry lifesaving missions, gave Noel a shot of morphine to ease his pain, and the aerial ambulance was soon off to Boise with a total flying time of one hour and twenty five minutes from Cabin Creek to Boise. A newspaper article about the incident said "The whole operation, it was estimated, took just a bit longer than it would take an ordinary pack mule to climb out of a deep canyon." (Idaho Daily Statesman, May 16, 1931).

There was speculation that Noel Routson might have been permanently paralyzed by the accident; however, physicians at the hospital in Boise found that not so. Noel's back injury did take a long time to heal, but by the spring of the next year he was back at work on mining claims on Crooked Creek and, by summer, was back working for the

Forest Service at Big Creek. As a result of this incident it was acknowledged that the rock outcrop was too unstable to support a tunnel. The trail was rerouted around the outcrop, but the unfinished tunnel remains a testimony to a resourceful Forest Service trail crew (Hartung 1978:161).

The 1931 "aerial ambulance" incident was the first aircraft landing anywhere in the Big Creek area and was among the earliest landings in the Idaho Primitive Area. The aircraft, owned by Bill Haddock of Boise, and flown by Bill Gowen, was a 1929 Curtiss-Wright Travelair 6000, FAA tail number NC-9846. Bill Gowen's first landing in Blackie Wallace's pasture subsequently brought fly-in big game hunters to Wallace's place which he named the "Flying W Ranch."

Later that same year, Bill Gowen was again noted in area newspapers when he had to abort a takeoff from the snow-covered Warren airstrip in December 1931. Gowen did not achieve adequate airspeed to clear the sticky runway, so he was forced to drop back to the ground shortly after becoming airborne, badly damaging his ski-equipped Travelair, but he and his two passengers escaped injury. (Idaho Daily Statesman, Dec 24, 1931; Idaho County Free Press, Dec 31, 1931). Not many people know the connection of Bill Gowen to Boise's original airport name "Gowen Field." It was named for Bill's brother James Gowen, a Navy pilot killed on a training mission in Panama in 1938, as noted on a memorial plaque in the Boise airport terminal building.

CHAPTER 4

FIRST USE OF AIRCRAFT FOR FIRE CONTROL SUPPORT ON THE IDAHO NATIONAL FOREST

J. William West

[Editor's note: Bill West had a number of jobs on the Idaho National Forest, beginning in 1927 as Forest Ranger on the old Paddy Flat District. Bill West was the Fire Dispatcher in McCall during the 1931 fire season, which included the great Salmon River Breaks fire which devastated the backcountry. The following report is a portion of a multi-page recollection of his early days on the Idaho National Forest which appeared in Yellow Pine, Idaho, a collection of stories compiled and privately published in 1988 by Nancy G. Sumner]

"I was serving as fire dispatch from McCall in 1931. It was a real nightmare - the fires. At that time we didn't have any equipment. We were still using shovels and Pulaski tools almost altogether. But that year we started getting additional equipment. And that year was the first year we ever used airplanes for the fires in that area. We weren't the first area to use planes, but that was the first year they had ever been used in McCall. I called out the first airplane that was ever used in that region, that is, on fire work, and the one they made the contract with was from Caldwell, but I don't remember his name [Bob King, in a Fairchild monoplane]. He came to McCall to pick up Chester Olsen from Ogden and Joe Bross from McCall and take them in to Chamberlain Basin. Chester Olsen was, I think, in the Regional Office at that time... Later he was Regional Forester. Anyway, he was at McCall, and this pilot was to pick him and Joe Bross up and take them into [the fire camp at] Chamberlain. But he couldn't get over Secesh Summit, and he was going in that way. He couldn't get elevation enough to get over Secesh. So they had to turn back and land again in McCall. He had just a small plane and the two men with him and couldn't get elevation enough to get over. He was going the long way around, but to get over the summit as low as he could. So he had to come back. And he spent a good four hours working on his motor, and then he took off again. And he had the same two men with him. That time he made it into Chamberlain.

"When he got in there, I think it was around 4 or 5 o'clock in the afternoon when he landed there and let the men out. Slim Vassar, who was [the fire control assistant] at Chamberlain Basin, said, "You had better wait for an hour or so until the wind dies down before you take off again." Well, the pilot was sure he could do it. He would be alone and could get out of there without any problem. So he took off. And about 7 o'clock or shortly before dark that evening, he came walking back into the [ranger] station. He hadn't been able to get elevation enough to get out of the basin, and he sort of pancaked the plane down in a lot of young tree growth there, and he was hardly injured at all. He had scratches and that was all. But his plane, of course, was wrecked - the fabric. And that was the first airplane that was used for fire purposes in that region I was in. [John Alesko, who later became maintenance officer for air operations in Region 6, flew into Chamberlain to make repairs to Bob King's plane to allow it to take off, as noted in Clare Hartnett's letter, below].

"Now they [the Forest Service] had used them [airplanes] in the Northern Region before that - north of here, around Missoula. So after that [big Chamberlain fire] happened, Johnson and Bennett, who were partners, had to learn about these fires [on the Idaho National Forest]. And actually, they flew down to McCall, so I hired them for the first job they ever did in the region. Again, not the first they ever did, but the first in the [central Idaho] region. They became very big in that region. In fact, it was the Johnson Flying Service out of McCall up till about seven years ago. I don't know what happened to Old Man Bennett. He was older than Bob Johnson [Bennett was born in 1885, Johnson in 1893]. He [Bennett] was a bush pilot from Alaska. Bennett was always known as Benny, but his initials were A.A. They had the contract for the Forest Service for many years. At that time they had it with Region 1, that is, the Northern Region. So they came down to McCall. They had a big [Ford] trimotor and a Zenith [Model Z6] biplane. Bennett used that Zenith for many years. There were no landing fields then. They landed in Chamberlain Basin in the meadow there. They used to use Cold Meadows for a landing place, too..."

Glenn A. Thompson

In a February 16, 1968, letter to Ranger Earl Dodds pertaining to the history of the Chamberlain Ranger Station, former Chamberlain ranger (1939-40) Glenn Thompson included the following information, "There is no record of the first pilot to land at Chamberlain [Ranger] Station. The plane is believed to be a 1927 model Curtiss Robin, three passenger, in 1931. [Thompson's notation about the first aircraft landing at Chamberlain is incorrect, as noted above]. The first [landing] field was located on the Stonebraker Ranch meadow [a mile north of Chamberlain Ranger Station]. Nick Mamer handled considerable fire fighters and freight into Chamberlain during the 1931 fires with a tri-motor Ford along with 16 other planes and pilots. Dick Johnson, brother of Bob, was among the latter. The Johnson Flying Service was just getting started then. The first field at the [ranger] station used the old meadow north of the station buildings. The Curtiss Robin landed there in late August after the timber approaches had been cleared. The Stonebraker Ranch field was used more than the Forest Service field until we built the new one in 1940. Bob Johnson, Penn Stohr, and I located the present runways in 1940. I personally guided the first tractor (Clark Air) into the Basin within 'Primitive Area Regulations.' The same route was used later to walk a D-7 tractor in to complete the present Chamberlain and Cold Meadows runways." [Construction of the Chamberlain E-W runway was begun in 1949 with smokejumper clearing a centerline path. During the 1952-54 period, the D-7 tractor cleared and smoothed the existing runway, under the direction of Ranger G. Val Simpson].

Clare A. Hartnett

In a January 27, 1968, letter to Ranger Earl Dodds, Clare Hartnett made these statements about the aviation history of Chamberlain Basin: "During the years 1925-29, I was an enlisted member of the 116th Observation Squadron, Washington National Guard, at Spokane. My first trip into [the] Chamberlain area, July 6, 1929, was as a mechanic crew member with Major C.V. Haynes, our squadron commander. It was in a Liberty-motored Douglas O2-H observation plane and he did not land there at that time. I am quite sure he and Lt. Nick Mamer made a landing there following that trip in a Con-

solidated O-17 airplane. I believe it was in the meadow east of Stonebraker's buildings... This could have been the first landing in Chamberlain, I don't know [As noted in Chapter 1, the first landing in Chamberlain was in 1928 by Nick Mamer]. The first landing I made in Chamberlain was on September 28, 1931, with an [Alexander] J-5 Eaglerock. At that time a small field adjoining the Stonebraker's buildings on the east was used for landings. You landed toward the house and off the opposite direction. I don't remember if anyone had landed on the meadow near the ranger station but believe the other place was used for convenience when going to Stonebraker's. Bob King of Boise had a take off accident in Chamberlain during some of the early activities. John Alesko, now in charge of maintenance with air activities of R-6, at Portland, made the emergency repairs necessary to make it possible to fly the Fairchild monoplane out after the accident. I don't know who made the first landing on the meadow near the ranger station. Probably Bob Johnson, A.A. Bennett, Nick Mamer, Bob King, and Vern Brookwalter were all in there before I was in 1934." [Editor's note: By combining Hartnett's and West's stories, Bob King was the first to land at the ranger station meadow, date unknown but probably in the first few days of August, 1931. Clare Hartnett, starting as a mechanic, had earned his wings with the 116th Observation Squadron by 1931, and was the pilot for the aerial photographic support for the 1935 National Geographic Society's Salmon River expedition noted in Chapter 11].

A. Eugene Briggs

[Ranger Gene Briggs, was called in from the Caribou National Forest to boss a fire crew on the 1931 Salmon River Breaks fire. His 1963 autobiographical Memoirs of a U.S. Forest Ranger includes these remarks about his transportation to the fire scene:]

"I left [McCall] for Grangeville around 6 p.m. that evening in a tri-motored Ford airplane. They said it was a dependable wheelhorse for getting men and supplies to the developed landing fields in the backcountry. The seats had all been removed except for those of the pilot and copilot. The plane was loaded with sleeping bags, food supplies, and seven men, including myself. They said the plane was good for 2000 to 3000 pounds of freight. The pilot was Nick Mamer, a veteran mountain flier. We had two high summits to cross between McCall and Chamberlain Basin. As we crossed over the second summit, we entered a dense pall of smoke from the fires and visibility was zero. The pilot circled the plane several times over what he thought was the vicinity of the Chamberlain Basin landing field, but could not locate it in the dense smoke. The pilot [Mamer] quickly made the decision to return to McCall, as it would soon be dark. Lookouts on Pilot Peak, Sheepeater Peak, and other lookout points had been following the progress of our plane, noting the dense smoke over Chamberlain Basin. They had heard the plane circling several times and then turn back toward McCall. Knowing the pilot may be in trouble trying to land in the dark. The men rushed several cars and trucks, gasoline lanterns, and flares to the McCall airfield and soon had it framed with lights. The pilot had no difficulty landing our plane thanks to them... The flight the next morning was delayed until about 10 a.m. in hopes the smoke pall would have partly moved out of the Basin. The smoke had cleared out sufficiently to see the landing field when we arrived about 11 a.m. and Mamer had no difficulty landing. The food, supplies sleeping bags and six fire fighters were unloaded. The pilot then left for Grangeville with only the pilot and me aboard." [Briggs was en route to Grangeville to pick up a fire crew to approach the Salmon River from the north, via Dixie].

CHAPTER 5 AIR TRANSPORTATION IN FIRE CONTROL

by A. E. Briggs

[Editor's note: This chapter is an extract of Memoirs of a U.S. Forest Ranger, by A. E. (Eugene) Briggs, privately published by Briggs in 1963. His Forest Service career spanned the years 1924-1953, from District Forest Ranger to Assistant Regional Forester for Range Management at the Intermountain Regional Office. In July 1931 Ranger Briggs was "detailed" from the Caribou National Forest to the Idaho National Forest as crew boss on the infamous Salmon River Breaks fire which devastated most of the backcountry. Gene Briggs proved himself to be such an able leader that he was reassigned to the Idaho National Forest as ranger on the fire-prone Warren Ranger District, assuming that post on June 1, 1932. Although Gene Briggs' interest and expertise was in range management, he is credited with being one of the early innovators in the use of aircraft in fire control in the Idaho wilderness. His recollections of early aerial support experiments follows:]

The use of airplanes for transportation of men, equipment and supplies to and from the few landing fields in the backcountry during the major fires in 1931 marked the beginning of air transportation in fire control in the Intermountain Region. Analysis of accounting records showing the costs for truck, pack animal, and air transportation showed little difference in cost. There were many advantages in air transportation, however, over the much slower deliveries by truck and pack strings. Men, equipment, and supplies could be placed on going fires in remote areas in much less time and in better condition. The old practice of walking men loaded with sleeping bags and fire tools for one to three days over rough country to get them on going fires was very soon to be outmoded by air transportation. After walking over steep trails for many miles under heavy loads, men were in no condition to do effective work on the fire line until they were given an opportunity to rest. Some of them were incapacitated during the period of the fire because of blistered feet from excessive walking.

The few developed landing fields in the backcountry beyond the end of the truck roads had been used to good advantage, but many of them such as Big Creek, Soldier Bar, and Chamberlain, were located in canyons or basin areas from where it was necessary to walk men many miles upgrade to going fires. It was necessary to transport supplies and equipment from these landing fields by pack strings. There was an urgent need to develop additional landing fields on broad ridges, plateaus, and high meadows. During my first winter [1932-33] in the forest headquarters office in McCall, I discussed the possibilities for developing landing fields with the supervisor [Charlie Scribner] and the other rangers. I suggested that we go over the forest map for our respective districts and, from our knowledge of the country, spot the locations where landing fields might be developed in the higher areas to provide the best distribution in relation to other fields and truck roads, and within reasonable cost limits. They agreed it was a good idea, but thought the matter of construction funds would be the delaying factor.

We spotted some 30 locations pretty well distributed all over the districts with allowances for areas already opened up by roads or other landing fields. The following summer [1933] an engineer, Henry Shank, was detailed from the Regional Headquarters at Ogden, Utah, to examine the areas spotted and pro-posed for landing fields, and to prepare cost estimates and recommendations. [A few years later, Henry Shank returned to the Idaho National Forest as Supervisor from 1936 to 1940]. A few of the proposed locations were eliminated from consideration because of excessive development costs or because the area could be served from some other landing field or road. From this beginning, a landing field development program was started. The landing fields most urgently needed that could be developed at the most reasonable costs were started first. Within a few years, landing fields were developed on Hida Ridge, Elk Meadows, Mackay Bar, and Cold Meadows. Much convincing information, detailed costs, and pleas were necessary to get the high authorities to loosen their grip on the money purse and allot funds in small dribbles for landing field development.

[Editor's note: The proposed development of airstrips in isolated areas for improved fire control logistics was a good idea, and was based upon the very effective use of the Chamberlain Ranger Station pasture as an airstrip during the 1931 fire. However, some of the proposed airstrips were overtaken by other events and technologies before being completed or used. World War II put a halt to the planned airstrip development, and the development of the smokejumper program in the mid-1940s essentially negated the need for any more remote airstrips than already existed. The History of the Payette National Forest notes that the Hida Ridge strip, north of Chamberlain, was cleared to a 2200-foot length by 1941 but was never used. Elk Meadows, a 2040-foot strip west of Burgdorf, was completed in the 1930s but later abandoned due to the construction of roads in the area. Mackay Bar remains an active airstrip on private land on the Salmon River. At Cold Meadows, a guard station southeast of Chamberlain, an 800-foot strip was constructed in 1933, lengthened to 3400 feet in 1955-57, remains a rough but usable strip. Work was started prior to WW II but not completed on airstrips at Ramey Meadows, Phantom Meadows, and Hungry Creek (Hockaday 1968:108-109). Briggs' recollection continues:]

It was difficult to convince them [the Regional Office staff] that air transportation was less expensive in the long run because of the savings in fire suppression costs than the much slower pack strings and trucks. The rangers agreed that air transportation should go beyond the landing fields. They believed they could foresee many advantages and great savings in fire suppression costs by dropping food supplies and equipment by parachute to fire crews on going fires in remote areas. They found that the advantages of air drops had to be convincingly demonstrated to the higher authorities before this type of transportation would be authorized and made a part of the fire control plans. After much discussion there appeared to be only one way to prove the advantage of air drops and one way was for the rangers to take on the job.

The Idaho National Forest had two or three airplanes and pilots under contract [with Johnson Flying Service] to transport men and supplies to and from landing fields. The rangers managed to acquire a dozen or so parachutes which were suitable for dropping cargoes food supplies and equipment from the air. One of the planes under contract

was a Travelair [Johnson's "Mae Gerard"], a seven passenger ship with short wing spread. It was very powerful and maneuverable, and also rough. Removing all of the seats except one for the pilot provided space for several cargoes of food supplies, sleeping bags, or fire tools. There was also space for folding the chutes in the rear section of the fuselage. When placing the folded chutes, the top was tied to a ring with a light cord or string so the chutes would unfold properly when the attached cargo was dropped from the plane. The door of the plane was removed to provide an opening through which cargo was dropped when the pilot yelled, "let-er go." It was a narrow doorway, more narrow at the bottom, making it necessary to lift the cargo before pushing it out the door.

The pilot of the plane used in our first dropping experiments was Chick Walker. He was skilled and experienced in handling planes in mountainous areas. He would maneuver the plane over the fire before selecting the dropping place, and these places were usually in rough areas. In the meantime, the dropper was to attach the shroud line of the chute to the cargo. After a trip or two over the dropping place, the pilot would yell "get ready," and , "let-er go." He would then bank the plane sharply and point the nose of the plane upward at the same time. After the dropper had lifted and pushed the cargo out of the door, he found himself braced with a hand on each side of the door frame, looking down into space. When the top end of the chute left the door, it was traveling like a bullet and there was always a loud crack similar to a sharp clap of thunder. The pilot would continue to maneuver the plane over the dropping place until all the cargo had been dropped. He explained that it was necessary to bank the plane sharply and nose it up in order to prevent the chute from becoming entangled in the tail piece of the plane. In any event, it was rough on the dropper.

During the dropping operation our only thought concerning safety was our hopes that the pilot could keep the plane under control. We gave no thought to what might happen if a chute became tangled with one of our feet or legs and flipped us out of the plane into space, or if we blacked out while bracing against the door looking into space below. In later years, strict rules were set up requiring a safety belt securely attached to the body and to a safety ring on the opposite side of the fuselage, and also a folded chute strapped to our back, with orders to keep one hand on the rip cord ring. I presume our failure to take precautions for our own safety was just one of those things foolish people will do sometimes.

The rangers had agreed to take turns in the dropping experiments, but during the first trip some of them developed nausea and became very ill. They really appeared bad after their return to the landing field. In fact, the pilot returned to the field a few times still loaded with cargo because the dropper had become too ill to do the dropping. It finally developed that Fred Williams and I were the only rangers who could make the dropping trips without air sickness, so we bore the brunt of the dropping job to prove that it could be done at reasonable cost. The only effect that I experienced was a severe headache for several hours after each trip. The doctors said the headache was caused from nervousness and high tension.

Only one incident marred the otherwise successful dropping operation and experiment, and this threatened to wreck the whole promotion program. A fire camp had been es-

tablished near Black Mare lookout [southeast of McCall] on the Lake Fork District. Food supplies and sleeping bags were being dropped to the fire camp. Ranger Fred Williams was the cargo dropper. After the first dropping trip, the fire boss called headquarters from the lookout by telephone and complained that the cargoes were not landing near enough to the camp. Fred received that complaint before starting the second trip and decided to land the cargoes nearer to the camp which was very close to the new lookout house. A quarter of beef was pushed out of the plane at a time when Fred thought it would land close enough to the camp to satisfy the camp boss. The beef landed squarely on the roof of the lookout house and almost went through the floor below. Fortunately, no one was injured, but it necessitated an expensive repair job. The air drop promoters had a real tussle to extricate themselves from the resulting entanglements with higher authorities who investigated the mishap.

[Editor's note: Fred Williams was one of the early rangers on the Idaho National Forest, beginning his career in 1920. At the time of the aerial experiments he was ranger on the old Lake Fork District, now the McCall District, a post he held until his death in 1954 (Hockaday 1968:169)].

Our dropping experiments marked the beginning of more extensive use of airplanes in fire control. Men were trained as parachutists and in the techniques of fire suppression. They were young, husky individuals and were organized in squads and were called smokejumpers. After intensive training in the techniques of parachuting, safety and fire suppression, they were landed on fires within minutes after the fires were discovered and while they were small and easily extinguished. Many of these jumps were made on fires in remote locations where it would have required hours, and in some cases days, for foot men to reach them. No doubt the fast suppression actions saved thousands of acres of timber and watershed, and hundreds of wild animals from destruction by fire.

Men were trained as cargo droppers and soon hot, well-balanced meals were successfully dropped to fire crews in disposable containers. Airplanes were used extensively for reconnaissance over blind areas [i.e. areas blind to fire lookouts] after lightning storms, and many smokes were discovered while they were small and easily handled. Air transportation was finally accepted as indispensable in fire control.

CHAPTER 6

"WINGED FREIGHTERS"

by Bert Eustis

[This verbatim article appeared in The (Boise) Idaho Sunday Statesman, May 8, 1932]

The Old West is gone. No longer do covered wagons, drawn by slow, patient oxen rumble and the Old Oregon Trail while marauding bands of Indians, sand storms, blizzards, or swollen streams threaten.

But the winter of 1931-32 has developed in Idaho new and modern pioneers, just as hardy, fearless and determined, who face different but just as terrible dangers. These new pioneers have crossed uncharted wilderness, treacherous peaks and ravines, great snowbanks and dense fogs, all to carry food, sustenance and news of the outside world to a number of isolated and snowbound mountain mining villages.

These twentieth century adventurers are the freight and mail plane pilots. The phrase does not include the men who guide the flight of transcontinental ships along definite routes, lighted and clearly marked with beacons and well tended airports, who have government voice and beam radios to help. Theirs is another story. The pioneers to which this story alludes are the men who are flying ski-equipped planes over peaks and crags to temporary and doubtful landing fields thousands of feet above sea level, where take-offs are difficult and sometime well-nigh impossible. There the snow clouds hang low nearly all winter and the air is filled with down drafts, cross-currents and pockets that seem to reach up and drag the plane and pilot toward deserted, cold, tree studded gullies - and death.

The men have conquered the air, however, and cheated the grasp of death. Only a few minor mishaps have occurred, such as breaking of propellers or skis on landing. Skis of one plane broke through the ice of Payette Lake early this year but the wing spread kept the plane above. It was lifted out with a tripod crane in short order.

Farmers may be plowing and planting in the bared soil of the lowlands and valleys of Idaho but the heavy snow still lingers in the mountains. The villages are still isolated and locked from the "outside" except by dog team or airplane. The plane will continue to be a necessity until June 1 or after.

Districts thus served by three planes of the Bennett Air Transport service this last winter are Atlanta, reached from Boise; Stibnite, Warrens, Yellow Pine, Deadwood, Chamberlain Basin, and Knox, all reached from Cascade or McCall. Men who pilot these pioneering ships are Chick Walker, A. A. Bennett, Bob King and Bob Johnson. The latter has returned to his flying school in Missoula, but the other three are still on the job.

Passengers and mail have been taken in and out of the villages. Express and food have been flown in to relieve distress and to feed the hungry. Necessary freight has been hauled to the mines that they might continue operation and supply employment to

the residents of their vicinities. Not the least of their service by any means has been that of rushing injured miners from isolated districts to the efficient hospitals of the larger cities "outside" so that lives can be saved.

Atlanta [a mining town north of Boise] has a nurse to administer first aid to the sick and injured. Other mountain towns are less fortunate. In one of these less fortunate villages, during the winter a tree fell on a man's neck, cracking a vertebra. He was placed in a plane and rushed to Cascade for prompt medical attention. Another mountain resident suffered from a ruptured appendix. He was put in a ship and an hour later was in a Boise hospital where an emergency operation was successfully performed. Scores of other injured persons have been taken from other places to Cascade and lives thus saved.

During the winter four bodies were carried by air from Atlanta to Boise and sent to Mountain Home or elsewhere for burials. Two were the bodies of snow slide victims. Another had died of heart failure and had desired burial in the family plot at Mountain Home.

Twice a week trips are made to Atlanta from Boise with mail, express and passengers. One round trip takes about an hour and a half. Occasionally several such jaunts are mad in a single day to afford delivery of accumulated express. The field at Atlanta is snow covered and must be rolled and packed regularly that the plane may land, for as skis cannot be used on the Boise port the landing at the other end must necessarily be the same - with wheels. The field is at an altitude of 5500 feet above sea level, says Pilot Chick Walker, but is far from the worst port to be found in the mountains. In years past the mail was carried to Atlanta at irregular intervals by a man on snowshoes - 50 pounds to the trip. The plane takes more than a 1000 pounds to the trip.

The most important and difficult job of the winter was ferrying 12,000 gallons of oil from Cascade to the Stibnite mine at Meadow Creek. The largest plane with a cabin [Travel-air] took four or five 50-gallon drums of oil at a trip. Smaller, open cockpit planes took less. When weather was good as much as 1000 gallons of oil was transferred in a single day. At other times weather threatened and snow came in blizzard style causing a postponement of flying. But the job was done and the mine operated all winter.

A supply had been stored before storms of last fall shut off trucking. During the winter trucks drove over a pipe line running from the tank, causing a leak and the oil had soaked away into the snow and ground. Had the airplanes not brought aid the mine would have been forced to shut down.[George Stonebraker's son Walter later said, "Practically all the airplanes in the state were called into service to haul the replacement fuel so the mine could continue to operate for the rest of the winter in this snowbound area." (W. Stonebraker, pers. comm., Dec 17, 2002)]

The landing field at Meadow Creek [Stibnite] is the most dangerous of the lot, says Pilot Walker. It is 7200 feet above sea level, is 1300 feet long and 75 feet wide. "We must fly over a 92-foot hump and drop to a landing immediately," said Walker. He added it was no longer possible to use skis on a plane landing at Deadwood Dam. During the winter

the planes could be landed on the reservoir ice but since the ice has broken up that is impossible. The makeshift ground field is rough.

[Editor's note: The Meadow Creek airstrip construction was begun in October 1928, and finished in 1929, by Bradley Mining Company (Petersen 2002:110). Bradley Mining Company purchased a Travelair 6000 in 1929 (serial 986, NC 8865), which has been restored and is now owned by Dick Waite of McCall and Hagerman, Idaho. This vintage aircraft is pictured on the front page of Payette Lakes Star-News, June 22, 1995].

Cascade, headquarters for the ski-equipped ships, had a snow rolled surface. Recently a warm spell removed the snow and headquarters were shifted to McCall where snow still lingers. A. A. Bennett landed a ski-fitted ship on the dirt at Cascade, however, he landed first in a mud puddle, to grease the skis, and hedge-hopped from puddle to puddle until the ship lost momentum. Landing on dry ground with skis is deemed almost impossible as the skis drag and are apt to make the ship nose over. On snow fields, however, pilots say they like to use the runners.

"I'd much rather fly a ski-equipped plane," said Walker. "It is easy enough to get braking power from the tail skid, which we wrap with chains. That slows the ship and prevents it coasting off the field as the uninitiated would expect."

Early this year the novel stunt of transporting sled dogs out of the wilderness was accomplished. A plane picked up the George Stonebraker dogs [at his brother Al's ranch] in Chamberlain Basin and carried them to Ogden where they won the Wasatch dog derby. A few of the animals developed air sickness but most of them made the trip in excellent condition, lolling and sleeping in the cabin of the plane.

Some of the pilots are married. Asked how it felt to know her husband was flying over rough mountain country almost daily, Mrs. Walker said, "We get a fatalistic feeling. What is to be will be and there isn't any use worrying so we don't."

Mrs. Bennett agreed and added: "We know the planes are kept in good condition and repair. The flights are nearly all short ones, not more than a half-hour duration each way. Moreover, we have confidence in the ability of our husbands and know they can manage their ships. After six years in Alaska there certainly is little to worry about here. Up north the pilots told their wives and friends not to start a hunt until the ship had been missing a month. They knew it might take that long, in case of a crash, to make their way on foot to some place where they could notify the rest of the world by wireless or telephone. The person who is afraid of flying and talks most about its dangers is one who has never been on a flight," continued Mrs. Bennett. "If everyone in the country took a few trips in the air there would be almost no fear of flying, regardless of the country over which the plane goes. It is absolutely safe and I feel more secure in a plane than an automobile."

The pilots make every trip count. Use of the telephone before each flight always informs regarding weather conditions at the intended destination. No trip is started unless there is good chance of its success. "We get paid by the trip," said one, "and it costs money to fly out and then have to return without reaching the goal."

CHAPTER 7

EMERGENCY EVACUATION ON THE 1935 NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC SOCIETY'S SALMON RIVER EXPEDITION

by Peter Preston

In the late summer of 1935, the National Geographic Society and the U.S. Geological Survey embarked on a major scientific expedition on the main Salmon River, making a transit down "The River of No Return", from Salmon to Riggins, by wooden scows, very much like the first transit made by "Captain" Harry Guleke in 1896. Obviously, this expedition took place long before the development of the jet boat which now permits travel on the river against its tremendous flow. In 1935 the Salmon River was still wild and forbidding wilderness and currently remains so, although the river is now the scene of modern day "explorations" by hardy outdoor adventurers. The Salmon River, which almost bisects Idaho in its flow from east to west, is the dividing line between the Nez Perce National Forest on the north, and the Payette National Forest on the south. The expedition's story appeared in the July 1936 issue of National Geographic Magazine.

The principal purpose of the National Geographic-Geological Survey expedition was to attempt to better understand the geologic nature of the massive Idaho batholith and how the Salmon River was able to cut its way through its dense granite shield. Among the expedition's members was Howard R. Flint, representing the U.S. Forest Service, whose job was to complement the geologic study with a study of the flora and fauna along the river corridor. Howard Flint, from the Forest Service Regional Office in Missoula, was earlier noted in Chapter 1 as the proponent of the use of aircraft in fire spotting reconnaissance, for which he employed the Spokane-based 116th Observation Squadron of the Washington National Guard. With Flint's relationship with the National Guard unit, he was able to arrange for the unit to provide aerial photography to support the expedition, as noted on page 98 of the magazine article. National Guard Pilot Clare Hartnett (see his recollections about early backcountry aviation in Chapter 4), and his observer-photographer E. C. French, met the expedition party at the airstrip at Salmon, Idaho, as the trip was about to begin, to map out the aerial photographic coverage. Hartnett and French flew over 2000 miles back and forth over the expedition's route, producing the spectacular aerial photos appearing in the National Geographic article.

As the expedition progressed down river, Howard Flint became ill after his bath at Barth Hot Springs. The magazine article [p.117] notes: "During the rainy night he somehow rolled out of bed, and before he was thoroughly awake was wet to the skin. In the morning he was weak and we decided to rush him to a hospital."

Expedition member John Reed walked ahead to a Forest Service telephone to call for assistance. The magazine article continues: "The rest of us broke camp, carried Flint to the boat, and set out in the rain. Arrangements were made for a plane piloted by Dick Johnson [brother of Bob Johnson, Johnson Flying Service], Flint's buddy on many a hazardous trip, to fly from Missoula, Montana, to Mackay Bar, a flat terrace which is the only emergency landing field in the [Salmon River] canyon. Even that was 25 miles away - two days by boat. Everything else was forgotten. We had to get Flint out!"

The expedition party moved down river as quickly as they could, and the easiest route was picked as Flint was confined to his sleeping bag. Still, the boat got stuck and all crew members tugged and pulled until the boat was free. In darkness they reached the Zaubmiller Ranch at Campbell's Ferry where Flint was off-loaded into a warm bed and given broth. The magazine article [p.118] notes: "In the cold dawn we carried Flint down to the scow on an improvised stretcher. On through the rapids we hurried... The moment the boat touched shore at Mackay Bar [Oct 13], we climbed to the landing field to find Dick Johnson, who had just landed, looking for us... After seeing the landing field, we could well understand why this small, powerful plane had been selected [a Boeing Stearman, as shown on p.124 of the magazine]. We arranged an improvised bed in the front cockpit, bundled Flint in his sleeping bag, and fastened two safety belts securely over all. As he bade us farewell, his last words were: 'Well, fellows, if the doc lets me, I'll join you at Riggins,' and then up into the familiar and friendly sky he sailed with his old flying comrade..."

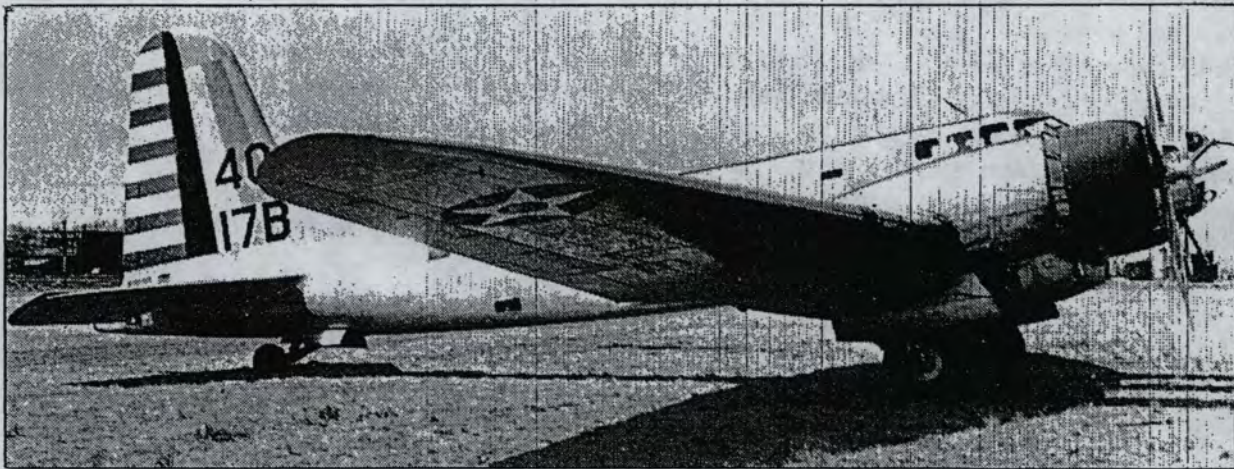
But Howard Flint did not return to the expedition. He died a few days later of the complications of an acute sinus infection. The National Geographic article [p. 118] states: "Flint's death in Missoula, Montana, while the expedition was in progress took from us a beloved companion and ended the career of a true scientist. He was an avid student, and his many years of experience as Forest Supervisor, aerial photographer, and Regional Forest Inspector had enriched him with encyclopedic knowledge of mountain lore."

(From "Down Idaho's River of No Return," by Philip J. Shenon and John C. Reed, in The National Geographic Magazine, Volume LXX, Number 1, July 1936)

CHAPTER 8 THE LOON LAKE B-23 RESCUE

by Peter Preston

The Douglas B-23 "Dragon" was designed as a short range heavy bomber. However, only 38 were produced as its capabilities did not measure up to the Boeing B-17. The B-23 did not see overseas war duty and the few produced were used for crew training. The first B-23 was flown on July 29, 1939. It had a wing span of 92 feet and was 58 feet long, with a tall vertical tail piece, as shown in the illustration. It had a range of 1400 miles and was powered by two 1600-horsepower Wright Cyclone radial engines.



DOUGLAS B-23 "DRAGON" BOMBER, WORLD WAR II

In mid-winter of 1943, the United States was deep in the throes of World War II, with many aircraft crews being trained for duty in the war. One such crew, members of the 34th Bomb Squadron stationed at McChord Field, near Tacoma, Washington, was on a training flight on January 29, 1943, from Tonopah, Nevada, to Tacoma in a B-23. The eight-man crew included Lt. Robert R. Orr, pilot, of Tacoma; Lt. Adgate B. Schermerhorn, copilot, of Ausable Chasm, New York; Lt. James Kelley, navigator, of Warren, Arkansas; SSgt. Edward M. Freeborg, of Seattle; SSgt. Ralph Pruitt, of Wichita, Kansas; Sgt. Forrest B. Hoover, of Tacoma; Sgt. Loewen; and Corporal Beaudry. A heavy snow storm blanketed their flight path in eastern Oregon and they attempted an emergency landing at Burns, Oregon, but could not find the landing field after circling the area for twenty minutes. The windshield had iced over so Pilot Orr decided to head easterly to Boise; however, they failed to locate the Gowen Field radio navigation signal (Freeborg, 2001:1; Payette Lakes Star, Feb 18, 1943).

As they could not see the ground in the snowstorm there was confusion about their location, so they ended up off course with heavy icing on the plane's control surfaces and they were running out of fuel. At one point Pilot Orr ordered the crew to don para-

chutes in preparation for bailing out, but decided that would be suicide in the winter storm. With the airplane icing and low on fuel, it became imperative that the plane be landed. There were very few opportunities for crash landing the big B-23 in the mountains without disastrous results. The appearance of a large flat snow field in their windshield must have been like an answer from Heaven. Frozen, snow-covered Loon Lake became their emergency landing field, almost 2900 feet long, but it was in a mountain bowl, surrounded by trees. It was a dangerous situation, but this was their only chance. They approached from the north, but over shot the lake on the first pass. There was only enough fuel to make one more landing attempt. On the second pass they belly landed on the frozen lake, and skidded to a stop in the trees at the southwest end of Loon Lake. The plane was badly torn up by the trees, but the crew members were not injured, except for Sgt. Hoover. He had multiple injuries, including a broken knee cap, broken wrist, broken foot (which later had to be amputated), and lacerations. Given the situation, the pilots demonstrated great airmanship by putting the big plane down in such an unfriendly environment without loss of life. The crash landing was late in the day, almost dark. The crew members went to the lakeside and built a fire. Sgt. Hoover was cushioned in an inflatable raft and covered with all the clothing the others could spare in the bitter cold. Sgt. Freeborg sent a short radio message the following evening, saying they were "at the south end of a lake near Boise Idaho," not knowing if the message had been heard by anyone. The message was heard, but was so faint and vague that it was not of much value in trying to locate the downed crew. (Freeborg, 2001:1-2)

The crew waited five days at the crash site with the hope that they would be found, but as that did not occur by February 2, Lt. Schermerhorn and Sgts. Pruitt and Freeborg left the site to get assistance. They were not well prepared for the trek on which they embarked, as they had to wade through waist-deep snow without snowshoes, but their flying clothing of leather coats, boots, gloves, and head gear provided minimum winter protection. They had a shotgun, matches, and three chocolate bars. They trudged to the north end of the frozen lake to its outlet and then two miles east down Loon Creek to the Secesh River (see map next page). Upon reaching the Secesh they turned south to follow the river downstream, as most lost woodsmen would do. Had they turned north and gone upstream on the Secesh, rescue was only four miles away at Jack Fernan's stage stop at Secesh Meadows on the Warren mail route.

The three flyers continued making their way down the trail along the Secesh River, stopping each evening to build a fire and make a shelter. They had very little food, only the chocolate bars and a squirrel shot by Sgt. Freeborg. Freeborg later said, "This we carefully skinned and cleaned, and then boiled it in our canteen cup for broth, later we split it three ways and ate it." On the fifth day of working their way down the Secesh River trail, they came to the point where Lick Creek joins the Secesh [current location of Ponderosa Campground]. Here they spotted a sign, pointing westerly, up Lick Creek, which indicated "McCall 26 miles, Lake Fork Power House 18 miles." The sign also pointed the opposite direction to a ranch, a short distance down the Secesh, so they decided to go to the ranch. After hiking 45 minutes they sighted a cabin at the mouth of Zena Creek [built by Clyde Parks on homestead established in 1922 (BLM Homestead Records)]. At the old cabin they found dry firewood, a stove, a tin of cocoa, about three pounds of flour, and some grease. (Freeborg 2001:4-5).

They dried their wet clothing, and made cocoa and flapjacks to fill their empty bellies. They also found a Forest Service map on the wall which allowed them to orient themselves and they saw that "civilization" was still many miles away, over Lick Creek Summit to McCall. They rested another full day at the cabin at Zena Creek, where they used all the remaining flour to make flapjacks to take with them. They left the cabin in the morning, retracing their steps about two miles to Lick Creek and began following the telephone line up the creek, wading through deep snow toward Lick Creek Summit (Freeborg 2001:5). Had they continued downstream they would have reached the Re-billet ranch (now Davis ranch) on the South Fork in about ten miles of almost no snow.

In their long trek through the snow, they subsisted on the occasional squirrels and birds that Sgt. Freeborg was able to shoot and make into a stew, and the flapjacks they made at the Zena Creek cabin. As they made their way slowly up Lick Creek through the deep snow, they stopped each day late in the afternoon to find a sheltered place under trees and looked for dry wood for a fire. On three nights they were unable to start a warming fire because snow was blowing so fiercely. Sgt. Freeborg wrote of his experience (Freeborg 2001:5):

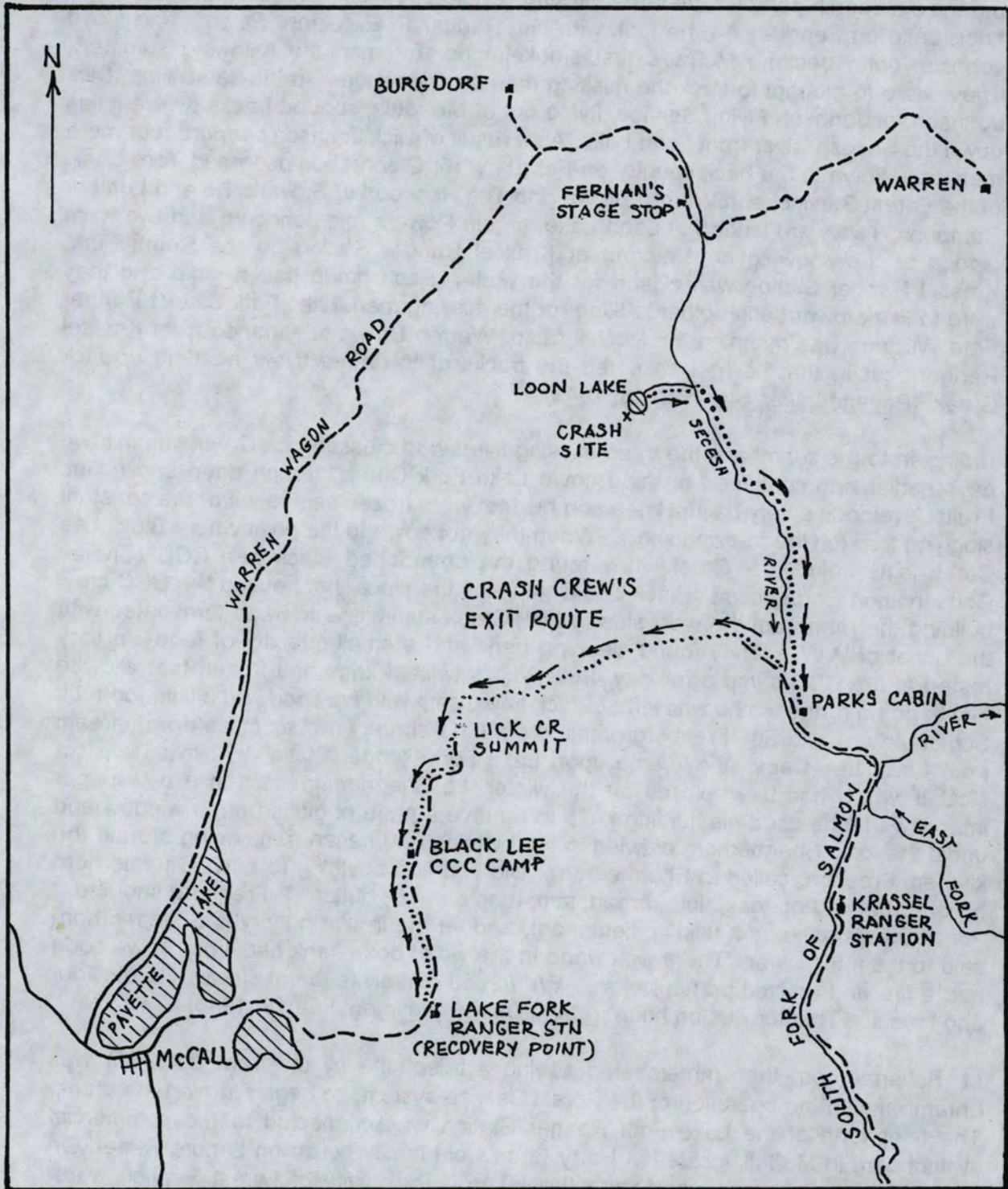
"By Thursday of the second week we were entering a huge valley between mountainous hills on either side [the glacial valley of Lick Creek, as viewed from its west end]. Frequently large roaring avalanches of snow and ice came tumbling down the sides but would spread themselves out and die before they reached the floor [of the valley] where we were. However, we could see many evidences of them which at times had come crashing down the sides, taking trees up to two feet in diameter right along with them. Friday we ran into the remains of an avalanche which covered the floor of the valley with fifty feet of snow and ice. This was the day we came to the beginning of the pass [Lick Creek Summit]. The pass being the hill which blocked the upper end of the valley completely, and whose sides rose from a 30 degree angle to almost 60 degrees in some places. In order to climb this at places it was necessary to stomp a foothold into the great drifts of snow, making a series of steps in their sides. Never have I run into harder or more tedious hiking than this was. We were buoyed up with expectancy now though, for we figured just over the pass was the valley that contained the powerhouse, McCall, and the lakes."

On Saturday, February 13, the three aviators climbed over Lick Creek Summit and soon found the end of the snow-covered road which they began following toward McCall. On the same day, February 13, Penn Stohr, a pilot for Johnson Flying Service, was making a routine mail delivery flight from Cascade to Warrens in the company's orange and black Travelair 6000. His flight path took him over Loon Lake where he spotted some of the B-23 crew on the lake, waving as he went by. On his return to Cascade, Stohr reported the sighting to Gowen Field, and before nightfall food was dropped to the hungry men. The next morning Stohr flew back to land with skis on frozen Loon Lake. He picked up the injured Sgt. Hoover, the pilot, Lt. Orr, and the navigator, Lt. Kelley, and flew them to Cascade where they were met by an ambulance and Air Corps officers from Gowen Field. Stohr then returned to the lake to pick up the remaining two crew members, all of whom were taken to the hospital at Gowen Field. The rescued crew members expressed grave concern for the safety of their three compatriots who left the plane eleven days earlier in search of help.

Idaho National Forest Supervisor Jimmy Farrell got consent from Gowen Field to organize a search party for the three missing aviators. When Penn Stohr went back to Loon Lake on February 14, he took with him Ranger F. E. "Gene" Powers and Lloyd Johnson (who became McCall's first smokejumper foreman the following summer). They were to attempt to track the missing men on snowshoes. At the same time, Dick Johnson, of Johnson Flying Service, flying out of Missoula, spotted tracks twelve miles down the Secesh River from Loon Lake. As a result of Dick Johnson's report, four more men were flown to the back country on February 15: Glenn Thompson and Tom Coski of the Forest Service, and Warren Brown and Ted Harwood of Brown's Tie and Lumber Company. Two were landed at Loon Lake, to join Powers and Johnson, and two were landed at the snow-covered airstrip at Krassel Ranger Station on the South Fork. Krassel Ranger Station was closed for the winter. Each group had a radio and they were to work toward each other looking for the missing men. Lake Fork District Ranger Fred Williams was manning the McCall radio. Warren Brown telephoned from Krassel Ranger Station that he had observed the tracks of the three flyers heading up Lick Creek. (Payette Lakes Star, Feb 18, 1943).

Unknown to the searchers, the three missing flyers had crossed Lick Creek summit two days earlier and continued pushing down Lake Fork Creek through deep snow. Sgt. Pruitt developed a very painful knee and his feet were frozen as a result of the constant slogging through the freezing snow. When they got down to the point where Black Lee Creek joins Lake Fork Creek, they found the abandoned Black Lee CCC (Civilian Conservation Corps) camp. Black Lee Camp was the place that housed the CCC crew building the road from the west side to Lick Creek summit, which was terminated with the onset of WW II. They found sleeping bags and a small quantity of food, so they rested at the CCC camp a full day. Sgt. Pruitt's twisted knee and frozen feet allowed him to go no further so he was left at Black Lee Camp with firewood and a little food. Lt. Schermerhorn and Sgt. Freeborg pressed on. On February 16, six miles down stream from Black Lee Camp, they came upon Lake Fork Ranger Station, 12 miles east of McCall, which had been closed for the winter. Lt. Schermerhorn said in a newspaper interview that he used his hunting knife to remove a pane of glass from a window and undid the lock. Schermerhorn crawled in the building and began rummaging around the kitchen. Freeborg called to Schermerhorn, "Did you find anything to eat?" Schermerhorn hollered back, "Potatoes, flour, bread, jam, maple syrup, butter..." Freeborg shouted, "For heaven's sake, quit talking, lieutenant, and let me in. I'm hungry!" Schermerhorn said to the interviewer, "There was wood in the wood box, thank heavens, ... we soon had a fire and I mixed up flapjacks ... We forced ourselves to eat slowly. He ate four and I ate six. That took us an hour." (Idaho Daily Statesman, Feb 19, 1943).

Lt. Schermerhorn then remembered seeing a telephone by the front door. He was unfamiliar with the operation of the Forest Service system, so began turning the crank. The telephone at the Lake Fork Ranger Station was connected to the commercial switchboard in McCall, located in Harry Bean's old family house on Lenora Street. On duty at the switchboard was Leona (Lonie) Hoff Park, wife of Forest Service warehouseman Don Park. Lonie Park was daughter of Henry Hoff who was a partner with Harry Bean in the telephone company (S. Preston, Feb 15, 2003, pers. comm.). When Lt. Schermerhorn began turning the telephone crank it lighted a button on the switchboard, but Lonie Park dismissed the light as she knew that plug was the ranger station



B-23 CREW'S TRAIL FROM LOON LAKE CRASH SITE

and the place was vacant in the winter months. The light continued to flash, so Lonie plugged into the circuit and asked, "Who is this?" A man's voice responded, "Who are you?" Lonie replied, "This is the telephone operator at McCall." Lt. Schermerhorn identified himself and said, "Oh boy, are we ever glad to hear you!" Lonie told him that the other crew members had been rescued from the crash site and were safe. Lonie made the telephone connection to Lt. Schermerhorn's commanding officer at McChord Field so he could report that they were safe. Word of their safety spread quickly and Lonie connected many calls to the snow-bound ranger station. In a later interview Lt. Schermerhorn said with a laugh, "After that the phone just kept ringing. The Forest Service called, the Associated Press, the United Press; everybody just kept calling us up." (Idaho Daily Statesman, Feb 19, 1943). Sally Preston [author's wife] remembers her parents, Don and Leona Park, telling this story in her childhood (S. Preston, Feb 15, 2002, pers. comm.).

The first call Lonie Park made upon hearing from Lt. Schermerhorn was to her husband Don Park at the Forest Service warehouse. He, in turn, started the action to recover the two men from the ranger station and Sgt. Pruitt from Black Lee Camp. The rescue party was assembled, including Don Park, John Wick, Yale Mitchell, V.L. McCulley, Leonard Lietzke, and Gil McCoy. Within a short time, a heavy sled was brought from the ski hill and attached to the power company Caterpillar tractor. The sled was loaded with sleeping bags, snowshoes, and a toboggan. The rescue team took off in the early afternoon on February 16, but were unable to cover the entire distance to the ranger station with the tractor because the snow was too deep, so they left the tractor and continued on snowshoes, pulling the toboggan. The first members of the rescue team reached the ranger station about 7 o'clock that night, but continued on to reach Sgt. Pruitt at Black Lee Camp. The team pulling the toboggan arrived around 11 o'clock and went on to Black Lee Camp. They made Sgt. Pruitt as comfortable as they could in sleeping bags on the toboggan and pulled him back to the ranger station by the next morning. (Idaho Daily Statesman, Feb 18, 1943). Before leaving the ranger station, the rescue party made a big breakfast for the flyers and themselves. Sgt. Freeborg said, "Oh me, oh my, how we did eat! I can't say enough for these rangers. They are absolutely tops, every one of them." (Freeborg, 2001:8).

The rescue team brought the three flyers into McCall that afternoon, Wednesday, February 17. Businesses and schools had been closed and the entire population of McCall was on scene to cheer their arrival. The flyers were met by a medical team from Gowen Field and were taken to hotel rooms in McCall to bathe and rest. The three had lost much weight and were looking forward to a meal of thick steaks and French fries. Lt. Schermerhorn and Sgts. Freeborg and Pruitt had trudged through deep snow for two weeks, covering 42 miles. The woodsmen of the area were amazed that the three men had survived such an ordeal. (Idaho Daily Statesman, Feb 18, 1943). From the author's viewpoint, had it not been for the woodsmen's practice of leaving a cabin with dry firewood and a bit of food, the flyers would likely have perished.

In a later interview, Sgt. Freeborg said, "I don't mind saying there were several times when we were badly scared. One night, just after we had crossed a creek, we heard animals howling in the distance. We thought they were wolves but we weren't sure.

Anyway, we counted our bullets and prayed hard, and the animals didn't bother us after all. We prayed more often and more seriously than any of us had ever done before, I guess. We sort of had to." However, Lt. Schermerhorn was more stoic about the event and, according to a newspaper writer, Schermerhorn "would not admit that fear had been a part of the trio's thoughts as they trudged and floundered to safety from Loon Lake." Schermerhorn did say, "We just kept going and never let ourselves think we couldn't make it." (Idaho Daily Statesman, Feb 18, 1943).

The 34th Bomb Squadron, the unit to which the B-23 crew belonged, was later stationed at Mountain Home AFB in southwest Idaho. The unit is known as the "Thunderbirds." On September 18, 1999, a number of personnel of the 34th Bomb Squadron hiked to the crash site at Loon Lake where they attached a memorial plaque to the wreckage of the B-23. The plaque reads,

*In Honor of the Men of the 34th Bomb Squadron Past,
From the Men and Women of the T-Birds Present,
Your Sacrifice confirms that
'FREEDOM IS NOT FREE'*

Lt. Colonel Tom Ritchie, leader of the group from the 34th Bomb Squadron said, "The purpose of this trip is to provide a linkage to our squadron's heritage. It also provided a chance for the young airmen to better understand the sacrifices made by the WW II generation. It's amazing to think what these men had gone through. First the crash, then their survival." (Long Valley Advocate, Sep 22, 1999; Star-News, Sep 23, 1999). Several years earlier, an Air Force team went to the crash site to recover pieces of the B-23 for conservation at the Air Force Museum at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in Ohio.

There were many heroes in this event: Penn Stohr for locating the wrecked plane and picking up the crew from the frozen lake, the men of the search parties, the rescuers that went to Lake Fork Ranger Station and Black Lee Camp, their supporting infrastructure, and the flyers themselves. They were all players on the same team; had it not been so, this event would have been a sad disaster.

CHAPTER 9 SEARCH FOR THE DOWNED

by John P. Ferguson

On March 30, 1943, a B-17F "Flying Fortress" took off from Walla Walla Air Base on a training mission to recalibrate its magnetic compass. The B-17, with a crew of nine airmen, was assigned to the 316th Squadron, 88th Bomb Group (Heavy), U. S. Army Air Corps. When the plane took off the weather was cloudy at Walla Walla, but later in the day a cold front moved in with severe weather which closed the base before the plane could return. The B-17 was directed to go to Gowen Field at Boise and return to Walla Walla the following day. The storm became worse, covering the area in which the plane was flying. No visible ground objects could be seen and airway beam and radio communication was useless due to static. With faulty instruments, the plane was flying aimlessly toward the central Idaho wilderness.

About 8:50 p.m. the pilot, Lt. Joseph Brensinger, noted that the plane's fuel was almost exhausted, estimating about ten minutes flying time remaining. Lt. Brensinger declared an emergency and ordered the crew to bail out. They did so, and their plight will be discussed further along in the story. Before bailing out the pilot turned on the plane's landing lights and turned on the autopilot. The low-flying plane, with landing lights on, drew the attention of people on the ground in the vicinity of Challis. Merle Markle, Fire Control Officer on the Challis National Forest, and several other people leaving a meeting, saw the plane and knew it was in trouble as it was losing altitude, flying in a circle in a steep bank. Almost at the same time, the plane was seen by Challis Forest Supervisor Earnest McKee and McKee's Administrative Officer, Herbert Smith. Markle conferred with McKee and Smith, then alerted Forest Rangers H.J. Freece, Archie Murchie, and Claude Morin. Ranger Morin, at the May Ranger Station, spotted the plane over the Pahsimeroi Valley and followed it until it disappeared behind a ridge and crashed. Morin took a compass bearing on his sighting and determined that the crash site was in Crane Basin, in the Lost River Mountains. Other sightings from Challis confirmed Morin's placement of the crash site in Crane Basin. [Ranger Morin subsequently moved to the Payette National Forest, as ranger on the New Meadows District, a post he held until his retirement around 1960].

Within 15 minutes of the crash the Air Corps base at Hill Field, Utah, had been contacted, along with Pocatello Air Base and Gowen Field at Boise. The Custer County Sheriff, M.H. Shull, was notified and Merle Markle, of the Forest Service, began organizing a search and rescue team. The sheriff's team started out that night, but the Forest Service team decided to await daylight. The four-man Forest Service team, with first aid equipment, food, and a radio, came upon the wreckage of the B-17 and could find no bodies. They reasoned that the crew had parachuted from the plane and radioed that information to Challis. With that information Merle Markle began to assemble a large cadre of Forest Service men and local experienced woodsmen into four search teams under the direction of Rangers Freece, Murchie, Morin, and Langer. The searchers were all knowledgeable of the wilderness area and were adept at rescue and survival techniques. An airborne search was put into motion. Penn Stohr, of Johnson Flying Service, flew to the area from Cascade, using the airstrips at Challis and Stanley

for his search missions. John Ferguson, a Forest Service employee on the Challis National Forest, initially flew with Stohr as an observer. Seven Civil Air Patrol (CAP) planes were organized under the direction of Major A. A. Bennett [who became Director of Idaho Department of Aeronautics the following year].

The first military personnel to arrive at Challis were Lt. Sid Schleimer and a group of men from Pocatello Air Base on April 1. They were taken to the crash site that day by Dave Mifflin of the Forest Service. On April 2 Captain Keith Kelly arrived from Walla Walla Air Base to take charge of the search operations. On the same date four military Cessna "Bobcats" arrived at Challis from Hill Field to join in the search, but the Cessnas proved of minimum utility as their low wings prevented good ground visibility. Each of the planes in the search had a local man on board as an observer and guide. Merle Markle and Dan O'Connor flew most of the search missions, which also included Morin, Smith, Murchie, Hansen, Kock, and Langer. On April 3 one of the CAP planes crashed within two miles of the B-17 wreckage when the plane hit turbulent air at the head of Devils Canyon. The CAP pilot Clell McDowell, of Twin Falls, and Lt. William Bartlett, of Pocatello Air Base, walked away unhurt.

On April 5 Capt. Bill Kelly and Lt. Arthur Crofts arrived from Hill Field with a Beechcraft stagger-wing biplane (UC-43). Merle Markle accompanied them on their first search mission in the Hoodoo Meadow area, but nothing was found so that area was removed from the search plan. That same afternoon a squadron of four Cessna Bobcats and the Beechcraft, with Ranger Charley Langer on board as the observer, took off to search the areas of the Upper East Fork, Slate Creek, Warm Springs, Sawtooth Valley, and Cape Horn. The four Cessnas returned to Challis at sundown but the UC-43 Beechcraft did not. On April 6 all available aircraft went searching for the Beechcraft, but to no avail. On April 7 the search area was expanded but still the Beechcraft was not found and it was feared that the crew would not be found alive. Snow on April 9 and 10 precluded flying. The aerial search continued on April 11 and 12, but it was not until April 13 that the wreckage of the Beechcraft was spotted in the Cape Horn-Soldier Mountain area, near Ruffneck Pass. No sign of life was seen at the crash site.

The Forest Service immediately organized a ground rescue party, operating from the end of the road at Stanley. A tractor-type toboggan and propeller-driven snow plane were used to ferry men and supplies over the 21-mile snow road to Cape Horn Lodge, where caretaker Webb Lanier was keeping contact with the search operation. From Cape Horn, the snow toboggan was used to transport the men at the lodge to the Fall Creek trail above Wagontown. Penn Stohr flew eight men to the Beaver Creek airstrip in his ski-equipped Travelair. Webb Lanier and Ranger Freece were the first to reach the crash site at 4:30 a.m. on April 14, confirming by radio that the three men in the plane were dead. An analysis of the wrecked plane and the crash site, by rangers Freece and Morin, concluded that the plane's engine failed due to lack of fuel while in a tight turn in the head of Fall Creek. The pilots had neglected to switch fuel tanks. The Fall Creek rescue party was composed of Air Corps Lts. Schleimer and Hammond, Army Dr. Haskley, Pilot Penn Stohr, and 14 other Forest Service and local men.

Backing up in time to the night of March 30, when the nine-man crew of the B-17 bailed out, the jump order is indicated by the numbers:

- (1) SSgt. Howard Pope, Asst Engineer, Athens GA
- (2) SSgt. Harvey Weigand, Asst Radio Operator, Indianapolis IN
- (3) Sgt. Edwin Grundman, Gunner, Compton CA
- (4) SSgt. Morris Becker, Radio Operator, Ozone Park NY
- (5) SSgt. Henry Van Slager, Engineer, South Bend IN
- (6) Lt. Austin Finley, Navigator, Broken Bow OK
- (7) Lt. George Smith, Bombardier, Los Angeles CA
- (8) F/O Howard Thompson, Co-Pilot, Springfield OR
- (9) Lt. Joseph Brensinger, Pilot, Fairfield AL

The crew bailed out in a line from south to north parallel to the Middle Fork of the Salmon River, between Big Soldier Bar and Little Soldier Creek, stringing out over a distance of a little over 19 miles. Sgt. Weigand landed on the bank of the Middle Fork near Sheepeater Hot Springs. He hiked down river until he heard Sgt. Becker yelling from the mountain above him. Becker had earlier met up with Sgt. Grundman, so the three airmen moved down river together to the mouth of Greyhound Creek. There they forded the Middle Fork to a cabin where they built a fire to dry their clothing. Sgt. Weigand tried to dry his shoes but scorched them badly, making it difficult to hike in them. The next morning they forded the river again and hiked down to the Pistol Creek bridge. At the bridge they crossed to the Challis [east] side and continued hiking down river until they heard the voices of Lts. Finley and Thompson. They crossed the river again and, as a group, continued hiking down river until they reached Indian Creek Guard Station on April 2 or 3. The following day Sgts. Weigand, Becker, and Grundman showed up at the guard station. It was fortunate that the flyers found Indian Creek Guard Station as it was a good, well-furnished cabin, with lots of food. There was a telephone in the cabin but the men couldn't get it to work until they discovered the cut-off switch on a pole outside the building in the late afternoon on April 5. The telephone rang and the men broke in on a conversation between Milton Hood, at the Hood Ranch, and a neighbor on the Middle Fork. Word of their location was passed back to Challis and the men were picked up by Penn Stohr on April 11, flown to Cascade, and then by Army ambulances to the hospital at Gowen Field. As a sad note, had the telephone switch been discovered earlier, the ill-fated flight of the Beechcraft on April 5 might not have occurred.

Lt. Smith, the bombardier, wrote an account of his experience in 1993, titled "Survivor." A brief synopsis of his experience begins with the loss of his flying boots with the opening shock of his parachute. He landed in a tree and hung there until the next morning when he dropped about ten feet to the ground. He began crawling through the snow with his feet bound in cloth torn from his trousers. He first climbed uphill to a vantage point to try to locate himself, but all he could see were snow-covered mountains. He then hiked downhill until he reached the Middle Fork on the third day. His feet were torn from branches and rocks under the snow, so on day four he walk no further. He stayed on the bank of the Middle Fork for three days, eating grass and drinking water from the river. On day eight Lt. Smith heard searcher Bob Spears [Milt Hood's son-in-law] shouting "hello" as he made his way along the river. Smith shouted "over here," and they found each other. Spears asked Smith, "Why did you leave the cabin?" Smith replied that he never saw a cabin. It was then that Spears knew that he had found another survivor, as Spears was hiking upriver to recover Sgt. Pope who had been

seen by a CAP pilot at the Joe Bump cabin on Big Soldier Creek. On the ninth day, it took ten men 14 hours to carry Lt. Smith on a stretcher the eight miles to the Indian Creek Guard Station. Army Doctor (Lt.) Alexander MacKay was flown in from Pocatello Air Base to give Lt. Smith medical attention. The flight was made in the dead of night by bush pilot Charles Reeder. Smith recalls that the doctor paced the floor all night because he did not have the proper tools to amputate his feet. And that was fortunate as Smith's feet were saved. The ground rescue team brought Sgt. Pope down river to Indian Creek Guard Station, then both he and Lt. Smith were moved to Milt Hood's ranch [now part of the Middle Fork Lodge complex] further down river. After waiting two days for the weather to clear, on April 11 Lt. Smith and Sgt. Pope were flown from the Hood Ranch airstrip [now Thomas Creek landing strip] to Challis and then on to Pocatello Air Base for medical treatment.

The last of the survivors to be found was Lt. Brensinger, the pilot. He was found by Ranger Claude Morin about the same time as Lt. Smith was found. Morin had hiked about three miles up river from the Hood Ranch when he spotted the pilot under a tree on the opposite side of the river. Morin forded the river, administered emergency first aid and called for horsemen who loaded the pilot on a horse and took him to the Hood Ranch. At the ranch, Army Dr. MacKay gave him medical treatment. A CAP plane flew Lt. Brensinger to Challis, then he was flown to the Pocatello Air Base hospital.

An extensive ground search for Sgt. Van Slager proved futile and was called off on April 18. He may have landed in the river and drowned. His body was never recovered. The rescue mission was finally halted on April 24. Penn Stohr returned to Cascade on April 25. He had played a major role in the search operation, logging over 100 hours in his Travelair (NC623H).

About 50 men and 17 aircraft were used in the rescue mission. Four men were killed and three planes were lost. The relationship between the Army and the Forest Service was very good. The Army did not have anyone with experience of any kind in search and rescue techniques in wilderness country, nor anyone knowledgeable in planning aerial searches in the mountainous terrain. As a result, the Army turned over planning and operations to the Forest Service. The Forest Service furnished all the equipment and supplies: snowshoes, toboggans, tents, camp gear, food, vehicles, etc. The Forest Service organized all ground search parties and furnished guides and observers to accompany the military and CAP pilots.

[This is an edited version of a much longer text under the same title by John P. Ferguson, published in 1996 as a Heritage Program monograph by the Payette National Forest, McCall, Idaho. John Ferguson (1919-1998) was one of the many rescuers and, at the time, a Forest Service smokechaser. The summer following the rescue (1943) John Ferguson became a member of the first smokejumper unit at McCall and made the first fire jump in the Intermountain Region. He quit smokejumping after the 1948 season and went to college, earning an engineering degree. He returned to Forest Service employment as the Cadastral Engineer for the Intermountain Region. John Ferguson did surveying throughout the region until his retirement from the Forest Service in 1980. He continued as a surveying consultant until his death in 1998.]

CHAPTER 10 A HISTORY OF FOREST SERVICE AIR OPERATIONS

by Jim Larkin

(The following text is an undated, unpublished manuscript by Jim Larkin written for the Forest Service around 1967. The text deals with aerial support to fire control in the western states, with a focus on southwestern Idaho. It has been edited for occasional clarification by Peter Preston)

Early Days

Emile Grandjean, supervisor of the sprawling National Forests in southwestern Idaho, makes early mention of the potential for air operations in the Intermountain Region (Forest Service Region 4). A faded yellow clipping from a November 1919 Boise Capital News tells about Grandjean assessing damages from the disastrous fire season of 1919. He concludes with the recommendation for "aeroplane patrol and increased use of wireless telephone." Grandjean's air patrol request was undoubtedly prompted by the successful air reconnaissance activities in Forest Service Region 5 [California] in 1919. A series of meetings between Regional Forester Coert DeBois and Major "Hap" Arnold of the Army Air Corps led to daily fire patrols by twelve military DeHavilland DH-4Bs being flown from Mount Lassen to the Mexican border. The patrols discovered and reported 550 fires and flew a total of 235,000 miles. Unfortunately, lack of funds dimmed this promising early start. However, in 1925 Forest Inspector Howard R. Flint, of the Northern Rocky Mountain Region [Forest Service Region 1], organized a successful aerial forest fire patrol with a Spokane-based Washington National Guard unit, led by Lt. Nick Mamer [see more in Chapter 1]. The Washington National Guard fire patrol activities led to a 1927 Forest Service contract with Missoula-based Bob Johnson for aerial fire spotting in Montana's Bitterroot Mountains. Johnson's early fire spotting job led to his establishment of Johnson Flying Service, providing support to Forest Service air operations for over forty years from bases in Missoula and McCall [see more in Chapter 2].

Developments in the 1930s

By 1930 fire patrol techniques had stabilized. New, post-WW I aircraft were coming on the market, and the Wright "Whirlwind" engine was rapidly replacing the obsolete Curtiss OX-5 and Hispano-Suiza ("Hisso") engines of WW I. Men like Flint, Mamer, Johnson, and others began looking for new ways to utilize aircraft in fire control [see more in Chapters 4 and 5]. By 1931, Utah-based forester T. J. Pearson had proposed the use of smokejumpers for initial fire suppression in remote areas. The official consensus, however, was that it was much too dangerous and wholly impractical. Almost a decade would elapse before smokejumper feasibility would become a reality.

Cargo dropping as a means of supplying fire fighters was basically unrelated to the development of smokejumpers. Cargo drops on actual fires began in 1929. By 1935 air supply was considered a routine operation. At the same time, aerial photography expanded from a small experimental project to large scale production and much of the National Forest lands had come under the camera's eye.

In 1935, the Aerial Fire Control Experimental Project was set up in the Washington Office of the Forest Service. The immediate plan was to continue experiments in the use of water and chemical bombs initiated by Howard Flint a few years before his death [in 1935]. As early as 1929, Mamer and Flint had teamed up to drop kegs of water from a Ford tri-motor. Ironically, a theoretical study by the Physics Department of the University of California at Los Angeles greatly slowed experiments with uncontained, free-water drops [from aircraft]. This study had "proven" that the slip stream effect would so break up the falling column of water that none could effectively reach the ground. This report slanted further experiments to ten gallon containers filled with chemicals. Results were so ineffective that nothing further would be done for ten years.

Central Idaho Backcountry

During the early 1930s a situation was developing in the backcountry of central Idaho that would have far reaching impact on Forest Service air operations. The Great Depression of the early 1930s covered the United States and increased emphasis was placed on production of gold. Many marginal mines [in Idaho] were reopened as out-of-work men flocked to the hills. The year-around demands of supplying this trade brought scores of "operators" to Idaho. Bob Johnson started his Idaho air operations, catering to the mining camps at Atlanta, Yellow Pine, Mackay Bar, Warren, and many others. He was joined by A. A. Bennett, Vernon Brookwalter, Virgil Adair, Bob King, Lionel Kay, Chick Walker, Tom McCall, George Stonebraker, and other names linked to early Idaho aviation. Important from a Forest Service administration viewpoint was the establishment of a trained, skilled source of air supply, not wholly dependent on Forest Service needs. Equally important from a Forest Service standpoint was the development of airstrips at most of the early mining camps. Surrounded by Forest Service lands, the mining camp airstrips would serve a dual purpose, allowing air access to large, roadless forest areas.

Various Depression Era programs were implemented by the Federal Government about this time. Works Progress Administration (WPA) and Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) camps were set up in the backcountry for road, trail, and construction work. As a part of this program about twenty airport starts were made in the Idaho Primitive Area. Poor planning by engineers inexperienced in mountain flying problems resulted in discontinuance of most of these ambitious beginnings. Many years later, remnants of these abandoned airstrip sites were visible at Hida Ridge, Butte Point, Phantom Meadows, and other backcountry locations.

Developments in Late 1930s - Early 1940s

The period 1936 to 1939 saw no major changes in Forest Service air operations. The time was spent smoothing out techniques and indoctrinating more and more of the western National Forests in air supply. One milestone in 1938 was the purchase of the first Forest Service aircraft. Region Five [California] became the proud owners of a new five-place Stinson Reliant.

In 1939, the Aerial Fire Control Project, [which was] begun in California in 1935, was transferred to Region Six [Washington-Oregon]. Drop experiments were conducted throughout the fire season. By mid-summer, primarily under the urging of David God-

win, Assistant Chief of Fire Control, the decision was made to abandon the bombing program and use the remaining funds to carry out a parachute jumping experiment. Eagle Parachute Company was successful bidder on a contract to provide parachutes, protective clothing, and professional jumpers. Between October 5 and November 15, sixty-five jumps were made, conclusively proving that smokejumpers could land safely in much of the typical forest land of the West. In 1940, the first fire jump was made by Earl Cooley and Rufus Robinson controlling a fire on Martin Creek on the Nez Perce National Forest. The highlight of the 1941 season was the development of static line deployment, eliminating the manually controlled rip cord.

By 1943 the smokejumper program had expanded considerably. Region Four [the Inter-mountain Region] became involved with a five-man squad detailed to McCall. The first fire jump in Region Four is credited to John Ferguson [see biographic notes at the end of Chapter 9] and Lester Gahler, dropping on a fire on Captain John Creek. Lloyd Johnson was the spotter and Penn Stohr, flying a Johnson Flying Service Travelair 6000, was the pilot. Smokejumper use expanded steadily, from fifteen fire jumps in 1943 to 377 in the hot, dry summer of 1949.

Post-World War II Developments

A Marine Corps paratroop unit from Camp Pendleton used a C-47 beginning in 1944 to combat the Japanese balloon-delivered incendiary bomb threat in the Pacific Northwest forests. The successful use of the C-47 led Johnson Flying Service to purchase a WW II surplus C-47 in 1946. Most of the smokejumper work in Region Four would continue to be done, however, by the venerable Ford tri-motors and Travelairs.

Highlights of 1947 include the first use of smokejumpers in Region Three [Southwest], the death of David Godwin in an airline crash, and the first experimental fire control work with helicopters. Smokejumpers participated in combined aerial attacks by the Forest Service and the Air Force. Again, fire bombing was limited to dropped containers and results were little more successful than the early tests in the 1930s. These tests utilized P-47 Thunderbolt fighters and B-29 bombers dropping proximity-fused tanks filled with chemicals and water, primarily over the forests of the northern Rocky Mountains.

A noteworthy event in 1948 was the activation of a smokejumper unit at Idaho City. Spearheading this operation was James "Smokey" Stover as jumper chief and Clare Hartnett as the first Forest Service pilot on the Boise National Forest [see more on Clare Hartnett in Chapters 4 and 7]. A surplus Noordyne Norseman was detailed to the unit and would be used for several years. Forest Service records note the purchase of the first Region Four aircraft, a new Stinson Voyager, in July 1946. Records also note that Eddie May was hired as pilot at that time. His tour of duty was less than a month, however, and Hartnett was hired in August 1946, so Clare Hartnett can be considered the first Region Four pilot. Idaho City records show 143 fire jumps in 1949, a record that would stand until 1957.

Forest Service Pilots and Contract Pilots

The early 1950s were quite routine in Region Four. Johnson Flying Service continued as the Forest Service contractor at McCall with Jim Larkin and Bob Fogg doing most of the flying in the Fords and Travelair. Clare Hartnett continued pushing the Noordyne out of the Idaho City airstrip with fire jumps averaging around 100 per year on the Boise National Forest. Region Four's first helicopter use was in 1949, with Johnson Flying Service basing a Bell helicopter at McCall. The first helicopter rescue in Region Four is believed to have been when smokejumper Ralph Wilde, suffering from painful back injuries, was lifted from a ridge overlooking the Bighorn Crags and flown to a hospital.

Early records indicate the gypsy nature of the first Forest Service pilot position. Clare Hartnett was hired by the Regional Office in Ogden and detailed to the Boise National Forest during the fire season. In September he would return to Ogden to complete his ten-month tour of duty for the year. Early memoranda outlining pilot duties are interesting. One states, "When the pilot delivers passengers to an outlying forest, he will check with the radio technician, assisting in radio repair while waiting for passengers." Several sources indicate this tie to the communications job.

Clare Hartnett retired in 1953. J. Karl Bryning, airport operator at Pocatello, was hired as Hartnett's replacement. Bryning was assigned to the Boise National Forest, establishing the first stable position in Region Four air operations. Smokejumper work continued at Idaho City. Bryning worked at the Boise National Forest mechanical shop during the winter months, where it was not uncommon to see Bryning wielding tractor wrenches bigger than himself. After flying the Noordyne a year, Karl Bryning was convinced that there were better ways to do the job. A surplus Air Force C-45 twin-engine Beechcraft was acquired to become the first high speed smokejumper transport in Region Four.

Meanwhile, other National Forests were making increasing use of aircraft. Smith Stoddard on the Salmon National Forest was doing a flourishing business. Rex Willims, a crop duster from Arizona, was spending his summers in Salmon flying the first Ford trimotor in the region not operated by Johnson Flying Service. Bill Woods, a backcountry pioneer aviator from Boise, was doing a land office business in the Idaho Primitive Area.

By the mid-1950s, almost all of the 26 National Forests in the West were using aerial detection patrol after thunderstorms and other uses of aircraft in forest management. Pilot qualifications and aircraft condition became more and more a problem as more operators and equipment were used. More emphasis started to be placed on inspection and control responsibilities of the embryo Forest Service air arm.

Karl Bryning became the Boise National Forest fire staff officer. Bryning and Assistant Regional Forester Boyd Rasmussen promoted \$80,000 in 1956 to purchase a new Beechcraft Super18 for the Idaho City smokejumper job. As the new aircraft was still on the assembly line in May, Jim Larkin severed his ties with Johnson Flying Service and formed Larkin Aviation to fill the need for a short-term contract at Idaho City, using his Cunningham-Hall (N444), until the Forest Service Beechcraft arrived on scene. The ini-

tial Beechcraft Super18 (N41R) was replaced in 1958 by a sister ship (N41Z), with Larkin's Cunningham-Hall doing backup work in 1956-1957.

Kay Flock, Supervisor of the Boise National Forest, and George Lafferty, Fire Staff Officer, arranged in 1958 the purchase of a new Cessna 180 (N140Z) to be stationed on the Boise National Forest. Karl Bryning moved to Ogden to assume the new position of Regional Air Officer. Jim Larkin joined the Forest Service ranks in June 1958 to become pilot for the Boise National Forest.

Aerial Tanker Development

After a lapse of almost twenty years, the infamous negative free fall water drop report by UCLA was disproven when the prototype Douglas DC-7 jettisoned 1300 gallons of water on the runway at Palm Springs. This drop produced a wetted strip 200 feet wide and almost a mile long. This accidental drop led to a measured test drop of 2400 gallons. Successful results led directly to the system now in use. The first fire retardant drop in Region Four occurred in 1956 when Johnson Flying Service and Bradley Air Service put Ford tri-motors at the disposition of the Forest Service. Bradley pilot Glen Higby flew several initial attack missions on the Boise National Forest. Jim Butler, reporting on the first retardant drop near Peace Rock in the Deadwood Reservoir area indicated, "...significant help in suppressing what could have developed into a project fire."

Air tankers more and more came into the fire control picture. Bob Savaria formed Universal Air Tankers, basing his fleet of B-25s at the Boise airport. Savaria also spent much time, money, and enthusiasm in tanking and equipping the first surplus Air Force C-97 Stratocruiser for fire bombing. His first use of the C-97 was in August 1959, with Jim Larkin as copilot. They make a successful initial attack on a sagebrush range fire on the Boise Front, however, the \$600 per hour cost, and negative attitude by aircraft dispatchers, doomed the C-97 from the start. Dispatchers said, "We won't roll this one until all else fails." And they didn't. Each use of the C-97 saw the pilot fighting a holocaust, with convection columns, fire storms, turbulence, and smoke. Needless to say, the C-97 was used only during blow up conditions and was limited in its effectiveness. It was phased out after one year of work in Regions Four and Five.

All tankers at this time were signed up on a rental agreement basis. More and more operators wanted a piece of the action and, during a hot fire bust, tanker bases began to take on the nature of a circus. A fire call would result in swarms of B-25s converging on the slurry pits, trying to get the first load out. Efforts were made to use the local, best operators first. However, with no contractual basis, this placed an untenable load on the dispatcher and fire control personnel. These problems led directly to the national study team under Glen Smith and the negotiated contract system. The B-25 continued to be the mainstay in the air tanker field until around 1960 when several fatal crashes occurred. Universal Air Tankers lost Pat Hendricks on a BLM fire near Hell's Canyon, apparently from an uncontrollable engine fire. Two crashes in Region Six [Washington-Oregon] were blamed on structural failure at the moment of drop. High drop speeds in

the B-25 would result in a pronounced 'pitch up' attitude. After supposedly isolating this causal factor, an extensive test program was entered into with the Air Force at Edwards Air Force Base. Results of this test led to grounding of all B-25s in Forest Service fire control. However, the BLM continued to use the B-25 with a failure rate comparable to other tankers being used.

Air Transportation of Fire Crews

Around 1960 another event was taking place that would have far reaching impact on national fire control. For Almost half a century, a large fire bust would lead to wholesale recruitment of the local area residents, including skid row pickup of almost anyone that looked like he could handle a shovel or pulaski. This being a job, when jobs were hard to get, led to rashes of man-caused and man-set fires. This is still a problem in remote sections of Alaska where fire fighting comprises a large part of the cash income for the season. The ineffectiveness, inefficiency, and safety problems incumbent with this system led to the organized crew concept that has almost completely taken over the labor forces on a fire.

The first organized fire crew in the [southwestern Idaho] region was at McCall with a Johnson Flying Service DC-3 furnishing transportation. With most of the Johnson fleet committed to Region One [Northern Rocky Mountains] and with the remaining non-scheduled aircraft severely restricted and mostly unavailable, more and more thought was given to [Forest Service] force account transportation of these crews. The first Forest Service DC-3 was acquired from the Utah National Guard in November 1963. This ship was ferried to Boise where an inspection revealed several serious air worthiness discrepancies. A DC-3 at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base was authorized for parts, but inspection of this ship revealed a much more suitable airframe. So, the National Guard ship became the parts source and the DC-3 from Davis-Monthan evolved to be the [first] Forest Service DC-3 (N146Z).

In 1964 Region Five [California] experienced a cutback in air operations. Their two Beechcraft C-45 aircraft (N105Z, N155Z) were transferred to Region Four to serve as inter-regional aircraft under Washington Office authorization. N105Z was subsequently declared surplus and sold. N155Z remained as one of the first line double crew transports. Region Four's large aircraft fleet was further complemented by the acquisition of a [military] surplus HC-54 (N143Z) in January 1967. N143Z was also an inter-regional aircraft financed by Washington Office funds. Additional large aircraft included N148Z acquired from the U.S. Border Patrol in early 1968. N148Z served as the Boise National Forest smokejumper airplane. For several years, Region Four operated a DC-3 (N154R) leased from Reeder Flying Service and stationed at McCall most of the summer. All of these airplanes were used interchangeably. The daytime could be spent hauling smokejumpers and during the night a fire crew could be moved anywhere in the western United States. The last airplane to be added to the Region Four air arm was DC-3 (N145Z), acquired from Air Force surplus, which was later scrapped and used as a smokejumper mockup at the Boise Interagency Fire Center.

Smokejumper Aircraft in Southwest Idaho

The years slid by almost status quo at McCall and Idaho City smokejumper bases. Johnson Flying Service remained as contractor at McCall with AT-11 and C-45 Beechcraft doing more and more of the work. The first smokejumper crash in Region Four was in 1965 when Johnson pilot Skip Knapp and smokejumper "Moose" Salyer went down on a cargo drop on Bear Creek.

At Idaho City, pilots Karl Bryning and Jim Larkin were joined by Dale Major. The Beechcraft Super 18 at Idaho City sported standby "Jato" power and 12-to-1 supercharged engines, making it the best available airplane for smokejumper work. Beechcraft N142Z, a [military] surplus C-45, joined the Idaho City air arm, serving as a back up to the Super 18. In 1963, [Forest Service] force account smokejumper work was terminated at Idaho City. The reason for termination was the inability of the Boise National Forest and the [Intermountain] Regional Office to work out mutually acceptable standby rates on the aircraft. A secondary reason was the expanding supervisory workload facing the Forest Service pilots. A contract was written around the Idaho City smokejumper project with Loening Aircraft Company becoming the successful bidder. The Idaho City C-45 (N142Z) was declared surplus and was purchased by [Loening Aircraft Company] as the number one smokejumper ship. A Cessna 206 (N206L) was also added to the contract, becoming a patrol and small two-man smokejumper aircraft for the unit. Pilot turnover was an immediate problem. Pilot evaluation, qualification, and training became a year-long job.

Rebidding of the smokejumper contract at McCall in 1966 saw Johnson Flying Service displaced for the first time in almost twenty years. Reeder Flying Service was the successful bidder, furnishing a Beechcraft Super 18 very similar to the Idaho City Super 18. Reeder also provided a turbine-powered Pilatus PC-6 Porter (manufactured under license by Fairchild-Hiller), marking the first use of this Swiss-designed STOL airplane in Forest Service air operations. In following years Intermountain Aviation gradually assumed prime contractor responsibilities.

Two Fairchild-Hiller Porters were on deck in July 1967 to start the smokejumper season. On July 10 Dave Schas experienced fuel controller failure in the new Garrett-powered aircraft. With complete power loss shortly after lift off, a forced landing was made. The \$100,000 airplane was a total loss, but no lasting injuries resulted. This ship was replaced by a Garrett factory aircraft and a searching analysis was launched, pinpointing the problem as a small clip improperly installed at the factory. The turbine-powered aircraft was years ahead in performance and capability but had its limitations. The hourly rate was high and it was very cramped with four smokejumpers.

In 1968 Intermountain Aviation acquired its first DeHavilland Twin Otter. It flew a very successful season at McCall, the smokejumpers accepting it without reservation. The Twin Otter - DC-3 combination continues to be the most versatile aircraft combination in smokejumper aviation.

CHAPTER 11 THE PLANES AND THEIR PILOTS

by Bud Filler

[Editor's Note: Bud Filler was a smokejumper based in McCall in the 1950s. He wrote Two-Man Stick about his experiences, published in 1999. The following is an extract from his book, reproduced here with his permission]

"You love a lot of things if you live around them but there isn't any woman and there isn't any horse, nor any before nor any after, that is as lovely as a great airplane, and the men who love them are faithful to them even though they leave them for others. A man has only one virginity to lose, and if there is a lovely plane he loses it to, there his heart will ever be."

- Ernest Hemingway

Ford Tri-Motor

The big silver-gray plane sat on the dirt end of the runway next to an open hangar. It was a tail-wheel plane, and its rear wheel, resting on the ground, seemed to position the large nose forward and upward to the sky, and even at rest, the plane looked as though it wanted to leave the earth and fly. The difference between this plane and the other aircraft at mid-century was that it had an engine in the nose and one on each wing. In later years professional pilots would have given a month's pay for an entry in their log books certifying that they had flown a Ford Tri-Motor.

Its wingspan was seventy-four feet from tip to tip, and the center of the wing where it joined the fuselage was so thick a man could crawl inside the wing. Its three engines were 365-horsepower Wright Whirlwinds, sturdy and dependable, but rarely in synchronization during flight. The fuselage was fifty feet long and could hold eleven passengers, or eight [smoke] jumpers, eight fire packs, a spotter and extra cargo. The payload of the Tri-Motor was 4000 pounds, according to Johnson Flying Service. The cabin was so high a six-foot man could walk with ease from one end to the other. With a fuel capacity of 231 gallons, the plane could stay in the air for five hours.

The three radial engines, with their uncovered cylinders, swung massive propellers. These huge props, together with the aerodynamic lift produced by the thick wings, got the plane airborne from short grass strips in the mountains. The control cables were uncovered, outside the square fuselage. Overall, it was a stout, massive plane.

The most eye-catching feature of the big Ford was its skin. Probably never before, or ever since, has a widely used aircraft been covered with corrugated duralumin metal. The corrugations ran parallel to the airflow on both the wings and the fuselage. When the engines were out of synch, which was most of the time, the corrugated skin vibrated something awful. The noise of the three Wrights was so loud passengers had

to bark commands at each other in the cabin, even more so at the end of summer after the side windows had been knocked out by pulaski handles that stuck out of the fire packs. But the plane was beautiful and dependable; and the jumpers loved it. It became affectionately known in aviation circles as the "smokejumpers' plane."

The Ford Tri-Motor could cruise at 100 miles per hour, and it stalled at 65 miles per hour. It could fly on two engines but not on one. If the last engine quit, the pilots would say, they'd aim the nose between two large trees, flare at fifty miles and hour to slow the plane, the trees would take off both wings and the plane would hit the ground a little slower, and the survivors could walk away. Or so the pilots said. But the jumpers were not convinced or concerned, because they all wore parachutes.

The passengers entered the plane's cabin through a small oval door in the fuselage [on the starboard side] just aft of the wings. The door was hard for a parachutist to get out, since the jumper was clothed in a heavy canvas suit, with a coil of half-inch cotton let-down rope in one lower leg pocket, a backpack main chute, a chest reserve chute, and a wire-mesh covered leather football helmet. But he got out [and], at the same time, the spotter was using up about half the space, crouching on the cabin floor, his head out the door, his left hand signaling the pilot to cut the engines for the jump.

The cockpit housed the pilot and the copilot, forward of the leading edge of the thick wing. The pilot looked past the large cylinders in the nose engine. Instrumentation in the panel, unlike the modern cockpits of today's planes, was simple: the altimeter, the rate-of-climb indicator, turn coordinator, air speed indicator, gyroscope, and magnetic compass. Fuel gauges, a tachometer, and oil pressure gauges for each engine were harder to find: they were located on the engines themselves and the pilot had to squint from the cockpit to check the readings. Flight controls were dual, wheel-like yokes for both pilot and copilot. The control wheel was moved forward to drop the nose and back to raise it. Turning the wheel to left or right moved the ailerons. Trimming the horizontal stabilizer was accomplished by turning a crank above and behind the pilot's head. The crank activated a shaft that ran the length of the fuselage to the horizontal stabilizer...

The Ford with three engines also had three throttles and three mixture controls, all located in the center of the control pedestal. Another unique feature of the Ford controls was the brake, often called irreverently the Johnson Bar. The Johnson Bar was three-and-a-half feet long and was located like the floor shift between the pilot and copilot seats. Pulling this big bar to the left gave the plane left brake, pushing it to the right gave right brake, and pulling it straight back applied both brakes. The only problem on landing was that the pilot only had two hands and two feet. Jim Nylander, a friend on mine, crop dusted in the Ford with Slim Phillips, another Johnson Flying Service pilot out of Missoula. Jim said the pilot needed three arms and three legs to land in the wind. He swears he saw Slim land once in a stiff cross wind with one leg wrapped around the Johnson Bar. Some pilots say the Tri-Motor was a peach to fly; it could take off a runway in four plane lengths. Others said it was work to fly the Tri-Motor. It responded slowly, but it was very stable in cruise.

Bob Johnson, who owned Johnson Flying Service in Missoula, bought his first Tri-Motor in 1931, and after five landings and take-offs knew it was the ship he wanted for his company's work in aerial freight operations. Later in the forties he used the plane for parachuting and fire suppression. Bob said the plane was a little heavy on the controls but "getting onto a real short strip, there was no comparing a Ford with anything else. Of the planes used at that time, the Ford would operate in half the space or less." He added, "You could turn in a 600-foot diameter circle in a Ford with a load in it. That was almost standing on its wing tip, near vertical."

The vertical stabilizer of the Ford was big and [the one most often seen in McCall] sported the registration number N9642. The model of the plane was 4-AT-E and it was manufactured by the Stout Metal Airplane Company, a division of the Ford Motor Company of Dearborn, Michigan. It was built in 1929 and, after some time in service, was purchased by the Johnson Flying Service in 1939. In addition to ferrying fire fighters and dropping cargo for the Forest Service, in the forties it dropped eight smokejumpers - in two-man sticks - on fires in Idaho and Montana. Number 9642 was stationed most of the time in McCall, where it was flown by Jim Larkin, Ken Roth, and Bob Fogg. [N 9642, Ford serial number 58, was first owned by Mohawk Airways in 1929, went through several ownerships, and was subsequently purchased by Johnson Flying Service on April 10, 1939; (Larkins 1992:196)].

Jim Larkin flew the Ford Tri-Motor 200 hours a year on aerial jumps and cargo drops. It was a stable plane in strong winds, but once, around noon on an exceptionally gusty day, with the air moving in waves over the mountain ridges, Jim said, "We were dropping cargo over a steep ridge on a fire at Pistol Creek. Del Catlin was kicking out the cargo packs. We'd made the drop over the ridge and hit a tremendous wind gust coming up from the next canyon. The Tri-Motor went inverted against full opposite aileron control. We had cleared the ridge and the terrain dropped off sharply below us and luckily I had some altitude to work with. I glanced behind from the cockpit to see what had happened to Del. Thought maybe he went out the door. Del was upside down on the ceiling of the plane. Finally, I got the plane level again."

In 1957, after 24 years of continuous service in the mountains and prairies, the Ford Tri-Motor - tail number 9642 - and its two pilots were lost forever near Townsend, Montana. The plane was being used to spray sagebrush for the Forest Service. The Ford was loaded with 400 gallons of herbicide and while working around terrain at an altitude of 6,500 feet, the left wing hit the side of a hill, cartwheeling the aircraft, and it landed upside down 350 feet away. Pilots Penn Stohr and Bob Vallance were killed. Penn Stohr had been with Johnson Flying Service for 25 years and had logged 12,000 hours in the air.

Curtiss-Wright Travelair

For small fires where only two fire fighters were required, the smokejumpers used the respected single-engine Travelair. The Travelair, Model 6000B, registration number 9038, was an orange and black, high wing, tail wheel aircraft... Its single Wright engine generated 300 horsepower. The Johnson Flying Service later boosted the engine to 365 horsepower. The Travelair, like the Ford Tri-Motor, was one of the few tail wheel

planes of that era which, when fully loaded, could still get in and out of the high mountain airstrips. [Editor's note: The Travelair, manufactured by Curtiss-Wright from 1928 to the early 1930s, was a fabric-covered airplane produced in several models. The Travelair Model 6000 was the most suitable for mountain work and was used by several air transport companies in the northern Rocky Mountains].

We loved the plane. After a lightning storm crossed the mountains we'd patrol in the Travelair - two jumpers and the pilot - to look for smokes in the forests. On many a lazy summer afternoon I'd sit in the open doorway of the plane, almost half asleep, my leather boots on the outside step in the slipstream, listening to the steady drone of the Wright and smelling the exhaust smoke streaking past the door. The trees and the small mountain lakes slipped away below, the blue cloudless sky everywhere around us. In moments like this I wondered why they even paid us for the job. But then we'd see the column of smoke just over the next ridge, in thick timber and pockets of tall, gray snags, high up in the rocks, steep as a cow's face, no grassy jump spots, the wings of the plane beginning to rock from gusts of wind, and my stomach would tighten. Then I remembered why we drew a check at the end of the month.

The Travelair was so dependable that by the end of the summer, when I was in top physical shape, I had a strange, immortal feeling that I could step out the door just about anywhere and not get hurt. In a more delirious moment, looking down out of the plane at a soft green meadow, I even thought I could do it without a parachute. Larry Clark would say, "Don't worry about your chute. If you've got your logging boots on, you don't need a chute." Then he would laugh in that devilish way of his. I reminded him that *he* always wore a chute when stepping into a thousand feet of air.

Jim Larkin said the Travelair was the best plane he ever flew. "I *lived* in that plane in the summer, logging 500 hours a year in the aircraft." The plane was equipped with skis in the winter for mail runs into the Idaho backcountry. Travelair Number 9038 was used for many summers until one day, high above the timber north of Payette Lake, its engine stopped. Gene Crosby, smokejumper and pilot, was at the controls and he brought the plane down to a dead-stick landing on the narrow dirt road paralleling the Payette River. The touchdown was successful but the plane was not designed for driving along mountain roads and the trees soon became hinderances. The plane was torn up but Gene's skill kept it from being totally demolished. He stepped out of the wreckage unhurt. The plane was never rebuilt, but thirty years later the framework and engine were acquired by Hank Gilpin of Kalispell, Montana.

Noordyne Norseman

In the late forties the Forest Service purchased its own plane, a Canadian Noordyne Norseman. It was another tail wheel ship, the preferred aircraft for rough strips. When landing any tail wheel plane, the touchdown loads were absorbed by the two main wheels under the wings. The tail wheel and rudder corrections were made by the pilot to keep the aircraft straight on the runway. The Johnson Flying Service pilots were trained to "three-point" their landings with the rear wheel contacting the runway simultaneously with the main wheels. The Noordyne was a high wing plane with an aluminum skin. Its single engine was a 1340 Pratt-Whitney Wasp, generating 600

horsepower at maximum revolutions with a constant speed propeller. It carried four jumpers, a spotter, and cargo packs. The plane was stationed much of the time at Idaho City where the lower elevation was more suited to the plane's capabilities. The pilots called it the "lead sled" and said getting it up to altitude was a day's work.

Cunningham-Hall

Another plane used briefly in the fifties was the Cunningham-Hall, a yellow bi-plane owned and operated by the Larkin Flying Service of Cascade, Idaho. The Cunningham-Hall was powered by a single 975 Wright Whirlwind engine, turning out 440 horsepower with a constant speed propeller. The big boxy plane was built for work, not looks. Its shape was reminiscent of some of the early, WW II German reconnaissance planes. Its fabric-covered wings blended into the fuselage of corrugated metal, the same familiar look of the Ford Tri-Motor. The entire side of the plane was a door, the yawning opening perfect for loading bulky cargo, up to and including a full-grown horse. Jim Larkin was heard to say, "With the door removed for jumper work, facing 250 square feet of nothing, even the most fearless jumpers huddled against the back wall."

Both the Tri-Motor and the Cunningham-Hall shared common heritage. Bill Stout's Tri-Motor was built by the Ford Motor Company. The Cunningham-Hall melded the talents of old-time aviation designer Thomas Hall, with the prestigious Cunningham Car Company of Rochester, New York. Jim Larkin, who owned the plane, said, "It tried to kill me every time I climbed into it." But it could land and take off with a full cargo load on mountain strips as short as 800 feet, such as the James Ranch [on the Salmon River], where it was frequently flown for mail and supply runs.

Larkin said the Cunningham-Hall was sold to the Hood Construction Company of Boise, which wrecked it on landing at Cold Meadows. The plane was dismantled and airlifted out by helicopter, and sold to Gene Frank of Caldwell, Idaho. Gene keeps it there at Frank's Field with the Jennys, Wacos, and other vintage aircraft.

The Pilots

The pilots might have joked from time to time about the temperaments of their planes, but all in all, the aircraft the jumpers used were wonderful. The planes were kept in excellent condition and piloted by skilled airmen. The pilots of McCall and the jumpers who disappeared out of the cabin doors had different skills, and often separated by a decade of age, but they developed a kinship that lasted through the years.

When the wildfires got tough and the days on the [fire] line were long, we needed the pilots. After days, often weeks, smelling of sweat and smoke, our filthy black pants hanging limp from their suspenders, stomachs threatening to eat our backbones, we'd give anything for a cargo drop at the fire camp. We knew we had to work the line again in the dark, to knock down the flames that had started up from the afternoon winds, and the only food left in camp was a couple of cans of beans and some used coffee grounds. Then we'd hear the distant sound of a plane, its echoes fading and growing louder along the canyon walls. We'd stop our digging and look skyward. From time to time the sound of the plane would stop altogether, along with our spirits and energies.

Damn, he's going to another fire, we'd murmur together, our heads dropping back to the dusty trench in front of us. But then the plane would come around the edge of a distant ridge, and there was the unmistakable roar of the Ford's three engines. The pilot had spotted our camp in the clearing, here he'd come, through the gray smoke from the burn, just under treetop level, the cargo bags falling from the side door, their white chutes opening and flaring in the wind.

He'd make a second and third pass, dropping more cargo, each time lower than the one before. I visualized the steaks, potatoes and cans of fruit the warehouse crew had prepared. There might be a note from Reid Jackson or Del Catlin, or a radio. Maybe somebody in the parachute loft had slipped in a couple of six-packs on top of one of the insulated food containers. That would be a bonus. We'd go back to digging line and cutting trees tonight with a full stomach, and a re-supply of grub.

The pilot came around for a final pass, higher to gain some altitude. From the side door the cargo handler waved, and the pilot waggled his wings. They'd be going back to town tonight and sleep in a bed. We'd dig into the supplies and afterward go back to work on these burned-over ridges until three or four in the morning. But we respected every one of those pilots. They never left us stranded in the mountains. It was almost as if they could read our minds.

[Editor's Note: Smokejumper-author Bud Filler was one of many fire fighters who praised the pilots and their planes. There were more than just a few instances when they were recognized as "on the spot with the right stuff" in a life-threatening or demanding situation. One such instance, recorded long after the fact in a letter to the editor of the Missoula Missoulian (September 18, 1968), by Forest Ranger W. K. Samsel, speaks for the many who needed their help:

"Here is how it was in 1940. I am on a fire in the Idaho wilderness with a 200-man crew of hungry fire fighters. The pack trains can't make in until tomorrow. How the hell will I feed this crew and prevent mutiny? It can't be, but it is! The drone of a Ford Tri-motor! It will never make it through the blanket of smoke covering the canyon. What? I'll be damned! Straight down out of the smoke! It's Bob in the Tin Goose! He makes a pass over to locate the drop zone. The cook has fashioned a rickety table. Old Hawkeye spots the table and it's the target. The next pass and out comes a box of rations and down goes the table. Who cares about the table; we'll eat tonight...!"]

CHAPTER 12 THE SALMON RIVER RUN

by George C. Larson

[This article appeared in Flying magazine, Volume 97, Number 2, August 1975]

... In the early 1930s, the post office at Big Creek, Idaho, let a contract for a winter mail route to a man who rode his horse through the snow until the drifts were too deep for the animal to negotiate without exhausting itself; the man would dismount and trek the remainder of the way to the post office on snowshoes, the entire trip taking a full day. It took him another full day to make it back to his route, which followed Big Creek and terminated at Cabin Creek; it became known as the Cabin Creek Route. By the mid-1930s, it was apparent that more was needed; and an outfit in Missoula, Montana, called Johnson Flying Service had airplanes available. In the winter, Johnson flew mail from Cascade to Big Creek Airport and to the post office at Warren. It also flew supplies to what was then the Mackay Bar Mine, which was the only airport on the Salmon River between the town of Salmon, on the eastern end, and Lewiston, beyond the western extremity. There was a caretaker at Deadwood Reservoir who got his mail and groceries twice a month through the services of Johnson, and the company also flew to Cabin Creek on occasion to deliver mail and freight. In the summers, Johnson picked up his entire operation and moved up the road to McCall Airport, from which it flew for the U.S. Forest Service. In the summers, the mail business fell off when roads opened to allow surface travel. In 1945, Johnson left Cascade airport for McCall; it has been there ever since.

The mining business began to lose money in those years as the easy pickings gave way to harder times and extraction methods that cost too much; when the Big Creek mines closed, the post office closed down, too. Although a post office carrier was no longer needed, there were still people in the area who had been receiving mail service and were entitled to have it continue; the Post Office Department put the Cabin Creek Route up for bids to the public. Johnson bid on the contract and won, and so began the company's marriage to carrying the mail to Cabin Creek.

Next, the Forest Service asked to have mail service extended to its stations at Cold Meadows and Chamberlain, which were manned only during the summer. These lay somewhat north of the Cabin Creek Route and closer to the Salmon River. The post office approved the extension of the route, and they were added some time before 1954. About 1955, a Forest Service crew preparing to float a bridge down the Salmon River for installation in the area of Campbell's Ferry asked Johnson to survey the area for possible aerial supply during the construction of the bridge. A pilot named Bob Fogg, who had learned to fly with Johnson and moved to the McCall, Idaho, operation from the company's Missoula, Montana, headquarters in 1943, went into the area on foot and set up a landing site [on the Zaubmiller Ranch at Campbell's Ferry]. Whether this was the foot in the door or whether the earlier extensions to Cold Meadows and Chamberlain had done it is hard to say, but soon afterward, the Cabin Creek Route was

In those years, he pushed Travelair 6000s - six-place, high-wing trucks and Ford Trimotors for the Forest Service working forest fires, carrying mail as needed by the contracted carrier and running hunters and fishermen to their hunting and fishing. Later, the Forest Service specified the Twin Beech and DC-3 in its contractual agreements; now the Forest Service uses its own Twin Otter.

Fogg says he will make his part of the last Cabin Creek run in a Piper Super Cruiser modified for mountain flying and that takeoff time will be about eight o'clock. Fogg is lifting cases of groceries into the tail of the high-wing Super Cruiser as I arrive. He figures on a payload of 350 to 400 pounds, mostly because the rough fields are hard on the gear, maybe too hard if the loads ran much heavier. There is produce and fruit and a bag of potatoes in addition to the orange-nylon mail sacks, each with a tag labeling the destination for the contents: Campbell's Ferry, the Mackay Bar Ranch and the James Ranch. The limp sacks, each with no more than a few letters in them, lie together on a large, wheeled cart that looks ridiculously overdesigned for its task, but which is probably called the "mail cart," and, by Heaven, will be used to stack the mail and trundle it to the airplane: such are the routines of the place.

Another pilot, Phil Remaklus, arrives in a medium dither, apologizing for having misunderstood whether he would be flying this morning; he will take a Turbo 206 to the Allison and Shepp ranches. Fogg and Remaklus help each other to load their respective airplanes. There is a fruit tree still to be installed atop the mound in the rear of the Super Cruiser, its roots bound up in a cage of burlap as if it were some drugged animal being shipped to a zoo. Two man-high bottles of propane go prone on the floor of the 206, to be overlaid with groceries - a ham shines up through the pile - and a Formica counter top in two pieces, the larger of which won't fit unless the two men can modify the airplane: they decide to leave it for another way.

Micknak arrives, the pipe smoker, the "Polack," the self-deprecating mechanic who, one instinctively feels, is the foundation upon which the whole operation rests. Remaklus and Micknak discuss the settings on the propeller governor and the manifold pressure readings for the 206: they had been a little off lately, and Micknak has adjusted them. They also discuss fuel and weights. These men fly so far below gross weights that it is never a question of being legally overweight but only operationally overloaded for conditions. They must be their own judges, and no magistrate ever had more incentive to deal with truth, for too heavy means too bad. They check their fuel not just with gauges but with a wooden dipstick scored carefully at each five-gallon mark; since they fly with tanks no more than half filled, it is their best way to know their fuel status accurately.

The passenger, Mrs. Richardson, arrives with a friend, the two of them drinking coffee from steaming paper cups. Remaklus is pulling the prop of the 206 through as Fogg turns to aid his passenger aboard. The 206 is first out to the runway. The day is clear, crystalline, with the ever-present smoke from the waste-burner on the lake spread out evenly in a thin layer over the town, the lake and the meadows west of the airport; again, it tells as clearly as any sequence report ever did, "winds 0000." Remaklus finishes his run-up, announces his departure over the unicom frequency, then takes off

with the muffled snarl that turbo-chargers have a way of voicing. The sound of his first power reduction is lost as Fogg, right behind him, runs up the Super Cruiser, all 150 horsepower present out a hefty slice not accounted for at McCall's 5,000 feet msl. Fogg lines up and takes off; he holds the tail down - or is it down of its own? - for about 200 feet, and the Piper floats off soon after. Surely there is helium in the wings.

I follow in a floozy, speed-striped 235-hp Charger as Fogg leads; he immediately turns to what later seems to have been the exact heading to the entry into the Salmon River Canyon - I never sensed any mid-course correction - and begins a gradual climb that will take us as high as 8,500 feet before he begins his descent into the river's anteroom. I know there are elk below us, because Fogg had told me so earlier, but the elk must have their minds on breakfast in private today, for they are nowhere to be seen. There is the meandering river that feeds the lake - a river now, a creek later, then a trickle when it turns dry - and a topographer's nightmare of knolls, spires, pyramids, spurs, ridges . . . how can Fogg tell one from the other? Moreover, the scale of it is evasive, for there is no telling whether each tree down there is a few years past seedling or a candidate for a mainmast. Without a familiar scale of reference, you are left with only your sense of relative motion to reassure you that you are, indeed, at a safe distance from the upward reaching land. From the safety of the airport and with one's feet firmly planted upon their foothills, these mountains seemed enchanting: now they are threatening, reaching up like vast anemones for us morsels.

At last, after some 20 minutes of cruise at about 80 knots, the Super Cruiser seems to pick up speed: but the velocity is due to descent. Fogg is on his way down to the river. The Salmon River is called the "River of No Return" on the local billboards and on the travel circulars that ballyhoo trips on rubber boats. The name actually stems from the fact that once you float down the river, the terrain prevents your returning by portage along its course. The river's potential malice should not be gainsaid, though, for although its 80.8 miles drop only 969 feet, sheer walls confine its course, so that when the volume of water increases, the river must rise: when it rises, it is no Salmon but a barracuda bent on spoor. The force of the river, at its peak, has rolled boulders along its bed. These boulders weigh many tons, and people on the banks tell of awakening at night to the weird thunder as these mammoths grind and moan against other rocks, rolling downstream like marbles under the dogged, persuading water. It is as if the Titans are playing pachinko.

The river is divided into forks and named according to geography, not always logically. The main portion runs from east to west. Together with its tributary system, the Salmon drains 14,000 square miles of terrain that drop from 8,000 feet to a few hundred; peak runoff occurs from May to July, when melting snow combines with rain to turn the individual feeder creeks to rivers in their own right. The spring waters are cold, and even in the heat of midday in the canyon bottom, there is a natural air conditioner at work to draw off the sun's warmth. In late summer, when the water is down, temperatures down in the canyon rise above 100 routinely. The walls of the canyon reflect and multiply the heat like one of those aluminum tanning aids, and black flies swarm up to turn the noons into a time-warped furnace where the minutes drag on forever. This natural kiln attracts only the hardiest as permanent residents, for they have the long, hard winters to brave as well, when they are absolutely cut off from all land-based transport. Tourists

trade in boat trips down the river, with stops along the way at sandbars and landings for food, a chance to take photographs, to stretch a bit. Also, the advent of so-called "jet boats," which are powered by a pump that throws a high-velocity stream of water out the stern and thereby thrusts the boat forward, are making it possible for the first time to take passengers *up* the Salmon.

Fogg's first stop will be Campbell's Ferry, which is a well-known river crossing that served miners hunting gold as a jumping-off point to the riches of Thunder Mountain. The mines are gone now, and it serves as a way station and resort ranch serving boaters and sportsmen.

The red Piper has been slowly but steadily accelerating even as it has grown smaller. I remain above the canyon in what is probably the vain hope that if anything goes wrong, I could glide to a safe landing atop the canyon's maw. I check the chart and note that the river is at 2,000 feet, and I am almost even with the rim, according to the altimeter, at between 8,000 feet and 8,400. When Fogg touches down at Campbell's Ferry, he'll be about a mile beneath me.

Down, down, drifts the Super Cruiser, winding now between the walls and shrinking to the size of some winged protozoan from my perspective at the top of this scaled-up microscope. The illusions crowd in: it is at once, for me, like tending a diver who is on a deep descent; there should be bubbles rising from the Piper. My mind wanders to classroom talk about how altimeters measure the proverbial "column of air," and here is Fogg flying at the bottom of one. Surely it must be possible to feel the weight of the gases down there.

Suddenly, the distant speck has turned a tight circle. Something wrong? There! Houses, a clearing. No, it can't be. This can't be Campbell's Ferry, and Fogg surely couldn't mean to set the little Super Cruiser down into that meager opening in the trees; it can't be done. He is probably just circling in greeting to whomever lives there. Another circle, then he is off upriver again. No, he's turned back. Like a red sparrow, he arcs tightly, and I lose him for just a moment under the wing. By the time I get the Cherokee turned to where I can see him again, Fogg has his airplane turned straight at the canyon wall. He seems to be barely moving as the airplane crosses over some trees - how tall are they? - and I see the shadow of the Piper racing up what must be a steep slope. The airplane and the shadow merge, there is the very briefest of rolls, and he is pivoting around on one wheel, nudged up against a stand of trees, pointed into the center of the clearing. It takes a few seconds to realize that we are, in fact, at Campbell's Ferry. I had not witnessed an emergency but a routine landing at destination.

How -? There is no time now to try to ponder what has shown every evidence of being an impossible feat. I could try to guess at the size of the airfield - clearing, strip, whatever - but it would be meaningless at this distance. Approach airspeed? I will have to ask Fogg those questions later. For now, I simply circle like an idiot buzzard too scared to chase the mouse into its hole and ill-equipped for the task. All the while, my eyes flick around for flat spots and find none; if anything were to happen now.

What am I doing here? More importantly, what is Fogg doing down there? What would he have done if the Piper, or its engine rather, had decided to call it a day? If he had misjudged the approach a bit, how could he have gone around? About 15 minutes later, the Piper moves down there, scampering uphill, turning in one motion, and running back down. In only two seconds, the shadow and the airplane have split again, and I realize that the Piper has performed another amazing levitation. Fogg turns downriver. Next stop: Mackay Bar Airport, the oldest strip in the territory. I wonder if there had been any ceremony attendant to this last run into Cambell's Ferry? Perhaps a cup of coffee, some kind words?

It is only a few minutes down to Mackay Bar, and the airstrip, unlike that surprising hole in the trees at Campbell's Ferry, is obvious from a distance - a white (probably sandy) runner at a shallow angle to the riverbank. At the downriver end stand some low buildings, next to which is parked an old Cessna, probably a 172. Mackay Bar is situated at the junction of the main Salmon and the South Fork, leaving a fairly wide opening in the canyon for Fogg to hang a U-turn and drop into the airstrip. He uses no more than a fourth of the runway rolling. Again, I circle above. There may be more business and conversation here, for there are two mailboxes to be serviced at the Mackay Bar: one for "Buckskin Billy" - his real name is Sylvan Hart - and Rodney Cox, Hart's nephew, and family; and one labeled only "Mackay Bar," for the crew at the ranch - there are six in residence today.

Fogg takes off in the opposite direction from the way he landed and cranks in an immediate right turn to follow the main Salmon to the next stop at James Ranch. Here, the mail will carry the address for Norman Close, who manages the place with his wife and two children. The James place has been described as having one of the more difficult approaches to a landing, but the word "difficult" has a whole new meaning here. The canyon is narrow at its bottom, but it widens a bit more quickly here than it did upriver; at least that's how it looks from my vantage point. Fogg elects to fly over the strip, part of which looks to be under water. then climb a bit before turning back. I can see the shadow from farther out on the approach this time, but I notice that Fogg has it slowed down to what must surely be the near-stall point. Again, that short roll-out and a slow, trundling taxi to the buildings at the far end. While I wait, I am surprised to hear Remaklus' voice over the unicom frequency, announcing his departure from the Shepp Ranch, just a mile downriver from James. Sure enough, here he comes in the 206, appearing to emerge from the very rocks, then banking around to climb along the river toward me. He scoots by underneath me and passes over Fogg's parked Piper without ceremony. Somewhere down there, Fogg is handing out the last sack of mail to the Close family.

"Back in 1954, we were using a Super Cub and a Stinson Station Wagon," Fogg is recalling, "then we had a 180 for eight or nine years, sold the Super Cub. I think it was 1967 when we got the first 206; it was a 1964 model, and we sold it after 6,000 hours. It wasn't until three years ago that we got our first turbo." All high-wingers? "Oh sure. You can't afford the ground float, you know, and the weeds really kill the leading edges on a low-wing. No, it's a high-wing operation all the way."

Fogg reckons he has 22,800 hours. At his peak, he has flown as much as 178 hours in a month, 700 to 800 hours in a year. These days, he figures he is flying at the rate of 350 to 500 hours a year. Though he doesn't say so, it is obviously to his advantage to fly time himself, for he must mind the budget and keep the McCall operation profitable. The office is lined with old photographs of past airplanes working at everything from bug spraying to air drops of equipment by parachute. There are the disasters, too: one photograph shows the Travelair with a ski driven through the snow crust ("It took a long time to dig 'er out.") and a wing tip buried. Fogg remembers each airplane, how Harry Combs bought the Stinson, how they were one of the last outfits in the county to keep a Ford Trimotor working; it finally left them six years ago, though parts for one still exist up at the Missoula maintenance shop, which arouses fantasies in Micknak - he would like to rebuild one.

Now there is the PA-12 Super Cruiser, good for as much as 400 pounds payload, the 185 on skis that is capable of toting 1,600 pounds without the seats or three passengers and 200 pounds of gear (on wheels, it does better) and the 206s, which, with 50 gallons of fuel, will haul five passengers or 1,000 pounds for Johnson. Into the really short fields, such loads are reduced by as much as half. Twins are not economical enough to earn their keep at five cents a pound for freight, so there are only singles for the foreseeable future. Micknak says he was skeptical about the turbocharged airplanes for quite a while but that they seem to have proved themselves; he now thinks they are dependable enough to become permanent in the operation.

The pilots and airplanes have a drawn-out learning curve in this kind of flying. Fogg says it took him 10 years to learn from his predecessors, one of whom was Dick Johnson himself, who later died in 1944 when a downwash caught him during an elk counting mission. Most of the pilots who work for Fogg describe themselves as his students, and even the pilot who took away the mail contract with the lower bid was after Fogg to check him out. A checkout with Fogg takes time. You might start by operating in and out of Chamberlain Basin, which, as these airports go, is easy. With time, you will go into fields of increasing difficulty, each time trying it with Fogg observing; when you are ready, he dismounts, and you get to try it alone three or four times, just like first solo. There are those who try it and just can't handle the pressure. Most of Fogg's pilots are, well, "mature," with the preponderance coming out of the retired military ranks. Fogg himself spent only 31 hours at cadet school before he was called back to civilian flying by the Forest Service, which needed his skills badly. Phil Remaklus is an ex-Air Force colonel. Bill Dorris is an ex-Marine and a Fish and Game pilot. John Slingerland is an ex-Marine. In the summers, Bob Franklin, also ex-military, comes aboard, joined by an airline pilot who wasn't identified. The pay? They never talk about it, probably because it is not commensurate with the task, probably because, on their military pensions, it doesn't really matter, and probably because it is the only flying left to find where nobody bothers them - nobody would *dare* -and they find a peace in that canyon that is not measurable in dollars.

Not that they are not conscious of the risks. One said: "People ask all the time, 'What would you do if the engine quit?' and I just say, 'Say a prayer and kiss my ass goodbye.'" There are no outs, no go arounds, no "forgiving" by the aircraft, no back doors -

nothing. There is only exactness, a Zen-like confidence in the outcome of the maneuver that would ensure its success even if one closed one's eyes. There is judgment and follow-through; nothing in between, for commitment is final. Each man knows what he will and will not do, and there is no bending those limits. One states categorically that he will not go into Cambell's Ferry with a 206, though he knows it has been done; another says he will not go into Campbell's Ferry with *anything*. (It seems like a good moment to ask Fogg how in the world he manages it into the 800-foot strip with its 17 percent slope. "You keep the Piper just above the power-on stall; it's been modified with flaps, you know, and with full flaps and power, you can get down to less than 35 mph." It was no trick; he was just hanging there.)

The secret to their flying seems to be that they pick their conditions. Any wind is too much wind, which means they do most of their flying in the morning, and if you want to make the trip, you'd better be there, because nobody will wait around for you. Once into the canyon, they will not proceed farther if they detect even the slightest beginnings of the draft that can get roiling down that wind tunnel and smack them around. There are wind socks at several of the strips and wind streamers at the most sensitive ones. Campbell's Ferry has a streamer that will pick up and move in just a whisper, whereas a wind sock wouldn't. Fogg allows as how he remembers only one go around. "It was at Mackay Bar. A horse ran out on me and I had to go around to avoid hitting it." He hastens to add, "But I was ready to land. I was lined up okay." One of their biggest worries is animals; if it isn't horses, it's the elk. Or a dog.

They are, to a man, sensitive about the intrusions of Government into aviation. They can recite quite accurately the regulations that govern their operations, including one recent one that requires them to fill out more forms to waive the requirement that they get permission 24 hours ahead before carrying liquid propane or dynamite or any other dangerous cargo. They report their Federal tax collections monthly, their passenger loads daily. They can recite the fuel price rises within the last three months to the day and exact amount. They know all about Mr. Ullman's tax plan.

They disdain towers and controllers and rules, the damned rules. They give themselves their own clearances and checkouts, and live in the knowledge that no man is as qualified to do that as they are. They despise anyone who purports to tell them tomfoolery in any area where they are more knowledgeable. There is the story of the Sierra Club group that came trucking through to gape at the trees, pointed at a three-year old burn in one portion of a national forest. and exclaimed. "Oh my, look how the lumber companies have clear cut that hill." The laughter on that is forced, bitter. They do not tell other people how to run their cities, and they do not expect strangers to come in and tell them how to run their woods.

Surprisingly, a respectable number of flatlanders who are new to the area stop in to ask advice before they plunge on. What is even more surprising is that these same yokels will then go out and do what they were going to do anyway, despite the best efforts of Fogg and the others to persuade them to wait until the winds are down or the tempera-

holstery and insulation. The Piper had scampered up here quickly, and all that's left to do now is to find a way in and down. We pass the landing strip at Warren, which places us west of the South Fork. At an OAT [outside air temperature] of 40 degrees, the carburetor ices up - the humidity.

The residents of the canyon all communicate with each other and with Johnson by a radio net that suffers terrible noise intrusions from atmospheric electricity. Two days ago, a giant thunderstorm had roared into McCall and blown dust up so bad you couldn't see to the end of the main street. The lights had gone out in parts of town. That afternoon, the radio had been nearly unusable for the static. Next year, there will be a single-side-band system installed that will eliminate that problem plus boost effective transmitter power. To the people who depend on them, there is more than an impersonal business relationship between themselves and the Johnson pilots. They call the day before, and someone at Johnson writes down their shopping list. Just this morning, Remaklus has come from the grocery store, where he has picked up an order for the Campbell's at Shepp Ranch (no relation to the Campbell's of Campbell's Ferry). He also sought out and picked up a bronze valve for some plumbing need or other.

Suddenly, the Piper whips into a hard right bank. Remaklus has spotted his opening, and just as quickly - right NOW - has made his decision to shoot through a saddle to the north, and then we are going down. Between two angled walls with some scrub on them, we plummet down to the river. The scrub turns out to be lodgepole pine, maybe 50 feet tall. Remaklus spots an elk all by itself, but I'm blind this morning. Finally, with his help adjusting my sights, I see it, too, a tiny blob of golden fur - the wrong color, the wrong size. I was looking for something many times that big and much darker. (Remember, the scale is way off.) The sun is breaking through the now-thinning layer, and the light catches rivulets of water on the heights that fall so far they turn to haze before they strike anything solid.

"Bear!" Remaklus is looking off to the right, and this time I see him right away, standing alone, looking at us, I think. How the hell is he holding onto the side of that -? "They drive sheep in here to feed, and every fall we have to help look for the lost ones." A dirt road appears halfway down the slope of the eastern wall, winds around, descending into a tortuous whip until it disappears again in trees.

There it is! We're at the Salmon River. We are still 2,000 feet above the water and descending, and I can see white water in spots. We turn right to head east to Shepp Ranch, which sits within its own canyon hard by the river. It is upon us before I could have reacted, but Remaklus began the turn in plenty of time, now heads in close to check for horses. Four of them are down drinking at a creek, and he is a little worried about whether they will spook and run onto the landing area. One more turn-around overhead and then he is satisfied; they don't seem restless. We aim back over the river, climb a bit and then turn, sinking fast and getting slowed all at once. Flaps are coming down, power is reduced, and the Piper is settling with a whistle. We are canted off slightly to the right of the runway's axis, and Remaklus waits until he has cleared some trees to correct, shoves in some power to halt the sink a bit, and WHOMP! We are down. I feel like a fool, for it has all happened so fast, and I haven't watched enough of what happened, and my pen is still poised above the kneepad, with nothing

to write. We step out of the airplane, and the effect inside the canyon is as if Remaklus has just flown us into the bottom of a well. The sensation of it all has been more hurried than I'd planned for. I should have carried a motion picture camera and filmed at twice the normal speed.

"You'd fly that a little different in the 206, of course," Phil is saying, "Fogg flies the 206 in here just like the Cub - turns a complete 180 out over the river - but I don't. I turn out and head upriver where there's more room to turn. He's done it more times." Remaklus sounds almost apologetic. My tongue is stuck.

Some people are stirring at the ranch. It is Anita Campbell, trying to start the Jeep. The water is up, and she has to ford a four-inch-deep stream to get to us. She pulls around behind to sidle up against the Piper's door and alights. She is a Madonna, a wisp of a girl with her hair in two pigtails and a loose work shirt hung gawkily on her shoulders.

"Jim'll be over in a minute," she says. Jim Campbell, a physicist, started taking people down the river because he was concerned about the exploitation of the Idaho forests, wanted people to be aware of the beauty. It became a business in the summer, became a full-time business, and when the Shepp Ranch went up for sale a while back, it became a whole new life. He trundles up, a troll in a T-shirt, with his beard sporting some straw at rakish angles. He and Remaklus confer. There is some trouble. Fifteen of their horses are down in a steep ravine, and they'll need help to get them out. They have already had to cancel one party because of the lack of horses, and Jim has to get them back to keep the business. Remaklus agrees that they should both fly over to where the animals are, have a look at possible trails out of there. Once they've figured out an egress, Jim will fly back to town and try to round up some wranglers to pack into the area and drive from the bottom end. The groceries are already scattered all over the back of Anita's Jeep; Jim and a hired hand, Ken Olsen, clamber into the airplane. Remaklus fires up and is immediately rolling; the man simply never uses brakes. The Piper disappears over a high knoll in the middle of the Shepp "runway" and the only sound from it is the echo off the canyon walls. When Remaklus passes over me outbound, he is already at a hundred feet and scratching for more. They turn west at the river and vanish behind the rock wall, the echo falling off quickly.

"You need an airplane in a place like this," Anita Campbell is saying. "We're all sure sorry that Johnson lost the mail contract." Will the new man carry groceries in and perform the same services Johnson does? "We think... we hope so... we're not really sure.

She talks freely of the new life, the problems, the history of the place, how she and her husband had always passed the Shepp place and thought fondly of one day owning it; when it came up, they knew they had to have it. Business is pretty good, and people seem to like the boat trips down the river, the chance to get this far away from the city. They have a plan whereby you can pack on horseback into the depths of the hills. No, she is not terribly worried about the water coming up.

After a half hour, the Super Cruiser lofts in from the direction in which it had departed. Remaklus loses some altitude over our heads and then turns back to the river for his final 180 before landing.

CHAPTER 13

BILL DORRIS AND McCALL AIR TAXI

by Peter Preston

Bill Dorris was a relative late comer to the backcountry flying scene at McCall when he arrived in 1956, but he made a lasting impact with his establishment of McCall Air Taxi in 1976, which continues operation today as McCall Aviation.

William H. (Bill) Dorris was born in Roundup, Montana, in 1921. He remembered seeing his first airplane there around 1926, when he was five years old; it was a barnstorming OX-5 Eaglerock. Bill was fascinated by airplanes and learned to fly at age 15 in a junked WW I airplane that he and his older brother salvaged and rebuilt. They learned to fly by themselves, "... We taxied around the airport until we got up our nerve. And then we started hopping it, and little by little, and getting farther away - much as they did in World War I, - and that's how we got started." When WW II began, Bill was enrolled in the Civilian Pilot Training (CPT) program at Bozeman, Montana. From there Bill went to the Navy V-5 pilot training program at Corpus Christi and was a Marine Corps aviator in the South Pacific during WW II.

After WW II, Bill was an engineer at Boeing Airplane Company in Seattle for a few years, then went to work for the Idaho Fish and Game Department in 1954 as a flying game warden, and was located in McCall in 1956. After nine years at McCall, the Fish and Game Department wanted to move Bill to another location, but Bill decided to stay in McCall. In 1965, Bill went to work for Johnson Flying Service as aircraft mechanic and pilot. Bill described working for Johnson Flying Service as, "... kind of a family affair... Just the three of us - Bob Fogg and his wife [Margaret] and me. And in the summer time we expanded a little. We had a couple of pilots on part time... We had some Cessnas - 182s. Primarily that's what we were using. They had phased out the Travelairs already... You could make two trips with a Cessna in the time it took you to make one in a Travelair, and you could haul almost as much as a Travelair in two trips. So you had to make two trips for one Travelair. And we had some Ford Trimotors when I first went to work for them." Bill went on to say that the vintage Travelairs were valued at twice that of the Cessnas and that the operating cost of the Cessnas was half that of the Travelairs.

"We had the mail run in those days, and we went twice a week in the summer time and once every two weeks in the winter time," said Bill. When asked what the landing strips were like, Bill laughed, "You wouldn't believe it! They were uphill and downhill and cross ways - hills - and everything you could think of. But at one time they were all certified for the FAA, which was a joke - didn't make the airports any better... The FAA would say, 'Can you land an airplane there?' And we'd say 'Yes,' And they'd say 'OK.' ... We're probably operating on some that are less than 300 feet long now, and they're steeper than a cow's face feeding downhill."

In addition to the mail, Bill said, "I've carried everything from mountain lions to domestic goats... The cougars we were hauling when Maurice Hornocker was doing cougar study back at Taylor Ranch. And he put a couple of cubs in a zoo over in Portland over

one winter. And then he wanted to take them back to the ranch the following summer. So we went out to Portland to get them and flew them back there." Bill later said, "We use airplanes like we do pickup trucks."

Johnson Flying Service had lost their long-standing Forest Service smokejumper contract in 1966, and in 1975 Johnson lost the mail contract to Arnold Aviation. Losing the mail contract essentially put Johnson out of business. Evergreen Flying Service bought the Johnson operation at McCall, basically for the FAA certificate, according to Dorris. Bill said, "I realized early on that I would not fit their [Evergreen] corporate image, so I started McCall Air Taxi [in November 1976]." At that time, McCall Air Taxi was engaged in charter flying for hunters and boaters and backcountry sightseeing, starting with a Cessna 170. Soon after, they started a summer operation at Stanley, shuttling boaters to their departure place on the Middle Fork of the Salmon. In 1993, McCall Air Taxi bought Wilderness Aviation at Salmon. By this time, three of Bill's sons were integral parts of the business. Mike Dorris was handling the Stanley and Salmon operations, and George and Pat Dorris were running the McCall operation.

Laughing, Bill talked about the reaction of some of his passengers when flown in to the backcountry airstrips. To one passenger Bill said, "Well, here we are! He says, 'Where?' And I said, 'We're going to land down there.' And he says, 'In that salt lick?' You get that kind of reaction from them all the time. This Evergreen pilot that I took into the Allison Ranch, he was a regular magpie on the way in there, chattering away... I came across the Salmon River, and I says, 'Well, here we are!' And he says, 'Where?' And I said, 'Where we're going to land'... and I pointed down there, and he never said another word until we landed."

When questioned on the dangers of backcountry flying, Bill replied, "You have to have good judgement. You have to understand the ways of the wind in the canyons... If you dilly-dally around and don't pay attention to what you're doing, you can get into a heap of trouble pretty quick. Most of the accidents have happened on pretty good airports back there... You can have engine failure. That's probably the only one we really worry about. My airplanes have had two. Thank God the pilots knew what they were doing. Didn't substantially wreck the airplanes or anything or hurt anybody. But it's a case where experience pays off."

Bill was asked to talk about the difficulty of flying a ski-equipped airplane. He replied, "Well, you don't know what it's going to do... And you can get out on a flat and you don't have any depth perception. So it makes things interesting. You become a master at power landings. That's where you fly in until - on power - you maintain enough flying speed to stay in the air. And you aim for the ground, and then when you feel it hit, then you chop your throttle. And with skis you're doing that all the time, especially if there's any ground fog forming. Because [when you] get it down and you're just above the fog, and you can't see a damn thing. So it leaves you with a lost feeling. Then when you're taking off, you have to leave the airplane on the ground until it gains enough flying speed to fly. So you essentially have to fly it off, and then conversely when you're coming in to land under those conditions, you have to fly it on, too... We have to use

them pretty early in the year at Cold Meadows, because that's almost 7000 feet... I went in there one year to pick up a hunter, and I only had one hunter and his gear in that airplane. And I would begin a take off run, and I'd go back by the outfitter's camp, turn around at the end of the runway, and come up back and throw some gear out at the camp. And I did that six times, and I was down to the hunter and his hat when we finally got out." When asked what was the problem, Bill said, "The snow conditions, primarily, and the wind." (Idaho State Historical Society, oral history, 1995).

In the 1970s, the Forest Service purchased a number of private properties in the Idaho Primitive Area on which there were airstrips that had been regularly used by Bill Dorris and others for access by hunters and fishermen. The Central Idaho Wilderness Act of 1980 created what is now known as the Frank Church - River of No Return Wilderness, which included those formerly private backcountry airstrips. With the Wilderness designation there ensued a controversy about the use of those airstrips, with the Forest Service intending to prohibit their use by the public. Bill Dorris became heavily involved in the politics of the situation, to ensure that the existing Wilderness airstrips would remain accessible to the public. With the assistance of Idaho's Senators Church and McClure, who were his personal friends, Bill was successful in keeping backcountry airstrips open that would have otherwise been closed by the Forest Service. Bill's son George said, "The fact that he was instrumental in saving Simonds, Dewey Moore, Vines, and Mile Hi airports was an accomplishment of which he was very proud." (G. Dorris, pers. comm. 2003).

In the 1980s Bill Dorris added more aircraft to the McCall Air Taxi fleet, secured a Postal Service aerial mail contract, and continued supplying backcountry locations with what ever his planes would carry. Bill's sons Mike and Pat became the company's primary pilots. The following is a 1995 magazine article by adventure writer Steve Cohen:

The forests around McCall are in deep snow country. Roads are sometimes impassable for nine months of the year, yet the few and far between residents are entitled to mail delivery. The only practical way is by air. "A lot of pilots advertise they fly everywhere," said [Bill] Dorris, "but they don't. They're afraid. We do. Only we do it at our time, under our conditions. That's how we survive." ... Smiling, he confided, "There are bold pilots and old pilots, but there are no bold, old pilots."

Employing a ski-equipped single-engine Cessna that can seat five, Dorris or his partners, sons Mike and Pat, fly a weekly backcountry mail route. Some landing fields are on hillsides, making them less than conventionally flat. Others have doglegs requiring sharp, precise turns during landings and take-offs, or are a scant 600 feet long. "We only land there if conditions are perfect," said Dorris.

Flying one February morning [in 1994] with Mike Dorris on a mail run, there were four inches of fresh snow under a low, dark sky in McCall. Messages from two-way radios reported up to six inches and threatening skies where we were headed. Father and son conferred on the ground. Mike was cautious but weighed the importance of this once-weekly contact for isolated postal patrons. "We'll go up," he said. "If it's no good, we'll come back."

Ignoring taunts from my companions about contacting my next of kin, I climbed into the cramped front seat beside the younger Dorris, both of us squeezed by cargo and mail. ... Taking off in a gray swirl of wet snow, we circled under clouds, searching for a break in the overcast. Slowly, burdened by a full load, the pilot climbed alongside the mountain ridge separating McCall from our South Fork destinations. Mike hunted daylight with seasoned optimism. "Once we get down over the Salmon River we can usually fly the length of Idaho," he said.

The plane was packed to the ceiling with 50-pound bags of dog food, newspapers, cases of sodas, snowshoes, and mail. With my seat lock forward as far as it would go, the Cessna felt like a winged Volkswagen beetle, cramped and with a noisy engine. Tracing the periphery of Payette Lake while aiming toward the wilderness beyond, Mike, a former U.S. Ski Team member, tipped the wings from side to side, nearly perpendicular to the ground, looking for a hole in the clouds. The plane is too small to carry the navigational instruments that would legally allow flying without visual contact. Locating a speck of blue sky felt like the proverbial needle-hunting in a haystack.

Turning in widening spirals, circling slowly up, then down the pilot always had an eye on a safe spot to set down. Because of his 17 years of flying experience, including 10 years on the mail run, Mike's familiar routine was awesome to a first-time passenger, something like being the ultimate amusement park ride. "This whole area up to the Canadian border is filled with airports. I always know where I can land," he said calmly. "Getting out is another story."

"Airport?" I sputtered, squinting down through misting snow at a tiny white strip framed by miniature firs and spruce trees. "We're using a lot of gas circling," Dorris said. "May have to set down to wait out this weather." He banked toward the narrow slash of untracked whiteness. "Don't be nervous if I pull up real fast." Skimming above tree tops Dorris patiently pumped a long handle next to my left leg, which hydraulically lowered or raised the skis needed to land or take off on snow. No space for automatic equipment, either. The device clearly had more in common with a barber chair than a 747. "No brakes on skis," he mentioned, levering the pump, his eyes fast on the ground coming up quickly. The skis locked, we touched down, gliding smoothly on the snowy field; then without warning Dorris gunned the motor, we gained speed, and were airborne. "Touch 'n go," he says briefly, unsmiling, cranking the skis back up off the wheels. "In fresh snow like that, getting going again can be a problem. We might have been stuck a few days down there. You don't have long to make up your mind on a 900-foot landing strip." By the time my stomach lowered out of my mouth, the cloud cover broke sufficiently to continue with the mail.

We were flying at altitudes under 1000 feet between steep canyon walls where hillsides dotted with elk slanted out of the fabled River of No Return. First stop was Warren, an old mining town with 11 year-round residents and a spacious 3600-foot runway flanked by several decrepit-looking cabins and a long, steel quonset hut. Flight time was ordinarily 30 minutes to this spot at 5992 feet. It had taken three times the norm. Dorris pumped the skis again, aimed for the runway, and slid to a smooth stop within yards of the local postmaster waiting for us on his snowmobile. In better weather we might have stayed for coffee and talk, but after quickly unloading mail bags, newspapers, cat food,

and ice cream, the three of us lifted the and spun the tail of the small plane to ski back down the runway after a five minute stop. While we flew over the townsite, the sun broke through highlighting Warren's 30 lonely wooden structures including an old mill practically hidden under low clouds hovering amid the Payette National Forest.

Next stop was Hettinger's Ranch. Deeper snow drifted against trees, defining a 1200-foot runway carved into a slope that helped slow landings and speed take-offs. The private ranch was surrounded by elk herds and mountain goats. We delivered magazines and mail to four residents - three adults and a baby.

The last stop was McClain Ranch. A couple met the plane, and a woman climbed aboard the now-empty back seat for a ride to McCall, preferring the 30-minute flight to a two-hour, 60-mile journey via snowmobile. We flew back over several ridges, which was much easier without the weight of the mail, though bumpy. Elk herds and miles between smoky homestead chimneys traced the serpentine river back to McCall. (Cohen 1995: 58-60).

In 1994, Bill Dorris had a disabling stroke, leaving him bound to a wheel chair; Bill's sons Pat and Mike took over active operation of the company. Bill Dorris died in March 2000. The late Jim Townley (1927-2002) remembered Bill for his sometimes caustic wit about flying in the backcountry, with Bill onetime saying, "When you take off down stream, it is down hill all the way to Portland, which usually gives you enough time to establish a positive rate of climb." (Townley 1995).

McCall Air Taxi was sold to Dan Scott in May 2002, and renamed McCall Aviation. Dan Scott is the son of early McCall smokejumper, Jonathan Scott. Mike Dorris continues with the new company as head of flight operations, and Pat Dorris continues as pilot and head of ground operations (Scott, pers. comm., Jan 13, 2003).

CHAPTER 14
JIM LARKIN, BACKCOUNTRY PILOT
by Peter Preston

Jim Larkin is a living legend among the daring aviators of the central Idaho wilderness. Leading to his membership as one of but a handful of pilots in the Idaho Aviation Hall of Fame is an extraordinary history of aviation achievements. At age 81 he is still an active instructor pilot, teaching the uninitiated aviators the ways of the winds in the mountains and canyons of the backcountry.

James C. Larkin was born August 20, 1921, in Colorado Springs, Colorado, where at age 6 he got a ride with a barnstormer that sparked his lifelong love of flying. Jim moved with his family to Idaho in 1928. He began flying in 1939 and with the onset of WW II he entered the Civilian Pilot Training (CPT) program in Boise in 1941. He finished CPT at the top of his class which led him to CPT secondary training, instrument flight instructor, Air Corps Central Instructor School, and assignment to the Rankin Aeronautical Academy as a flight instructor. Jim then went to High Altitude School in the C-46 Curtiss Commando, leading him to flying the "hump" from India to China in WW II.

After WW II, Jim and his brother began development of the airfield at his home town of Donnelly, Idaho, from which he did crop dusting in the Yakima Valley and forest insect spraying in northern Idaho for the Forest Service. Jim became a pilot for Johnson Flying Service, stationed in McCall, during which time he became an expert mountain pilot in the Ford Tri-motor and Travelair aircraft, dropping smokejumpers and cargo for the Forest Service and supplying backcountry mining and ranching activities for 8 years.

In 1957, Jim Larkin took the opportunity to establish his own flying service. With his Cunningham-Hall airplane he was contracted by the Forest Service to provide airlift for the smokejumper activity at Idaho City. During the 1957-1958 period, Jim also worked with Universal Air Tankers in the development of dropping chemical retardants for fire control. Having worked as a contractor for the Forest Service for a number of years, Jim Larkin was appointed in 1958 as Forest Service pilot at Boise. In that position he and Boise National Forest Air Operations Officer J. Karl Bryning developed the "Airplane Pilot Qualification Card: Special Missions," which was required of all pilots to transport Forest Service personnel in the backcountry. This qualification card requirement is still in use today and is credited with avoiding numerous fatal accidents.

In 1964, the Western Zone Air Unit, predecessor to the Boise Interagency Fire Center, was created with Jim Larkin as Director and Chief Pilot for the Forest Service Region 4. In this position Jim was responsible for the application of infra-red aerial fire mapping to locate and determine the extent of forest fires. Jim retired from the Forest Service in 1978, but continues as an active aviator. He has flown as principal pilot for several Idaho corporate activities with backcountry interests and since 1996 has been a backcountry flight instructor for McCall Mountain / Canyon Flying Seminars.

During his long career, Jim Larkin has had a number of "incidents" that are descriptive of the environment that he, and his fellow aviators, deal with as backcountry pilots. A few of those incidents are noted here:

On May 1, 1954, Jim Larkin was piloting the Johnson Flying Service Ford Tri-motor NC-9642 on a typical mission of dropping salt blocks in Chamberlain Basin to move the elk herds early from their winter range on the Salmon River breaks into Chamberlain Basin. On board to drop the salt blocks were Chamberlain District Ranger Val Simpson and Don Grimes of the Idaho Fish and Game Department. The Chamberlain Ranger Station had been unoccupied for the winter, so Ranger Simpson wanted to check on the condition of the buildings. Larkin landed on the familiar north-south airstrip. After the buildings were checked, Jim was taxiing for takeoff when he hit a soggy patch in front of the ranger's dwelling. That soggy patch, the result of a poorly drained trickle of a stream, had long been a problem (and has since been repaired). The big Ford, moving under power, bogged down in the soggy spot, tipping the airplane on its nose, tail high in the air. The propeller of the center engine was damaged beyond repair. The right engine propeller was slightly damaged. The men removed the right engine prop and Jim straightened it, using a big anvil and heavy hammer from the ranger station warehouse. Meanwhile, Jim had radioed Missoula for a replacement prop for the center engine to be flown in. While the prop was en route from Missoula, the straightened right prop was installed. After a number of tries, the Ford's tail wheel, high in the air, was lassoed by Simpson so that he and Grimes could use their weight to pull down on the plane's tail. With Larkin in the cockpit, Simpson and Grimes could pull the tail down enough that Larkin could use the power of the outboard engines to move the plane out of the mud. The new prop for the center engine arrived from Missoula and was installed. Larkin maneuvered the plane for take off, this time avoiding the soggy spot, and was soon airborne. Jim was a little embarrassed by the situation, but one certainly has to give him, and his "crew", credit for their resourcefulness in making the on-site repairs. (Simpson, pers. comm. 1999).

Around 1954, the Payette National Forest, anticipating building a pack bridge near remote Campbell's Ferry on the Salmon River, asked Bob Fogg, of Johnson Flying Service, if a landing strip could be prepared in the vicinity of the bridge site. There were no "flat" spots in that part of the canyon, so Bob did the best he could with a side hill pasture at the Zaubmiller ranch at Campbell's Ferry. The resulting "airstrip" is a most difficult one, about 650 feet long at an 18 percent grade, in which one lands flying at the wall of the canyon. During the early stages of the construction of the pack bridge, Frances Zaubmiller (who became known to the pilots irreverently as "The Belle of the Back Woods") wrote the following in a December 31, 1955, newspaper article:

"The [Campbell's] Ferry landing strip isn't for amateurs - we realized that when Jim Larkin asked if a plane had ever 'fell off the strip.' Since then we have seen the perfect 'ski jump' aeroplane style, and did you ever see a pilot 'bulldog' a plane? We did today. Of course you have the idea now that the strip is slanted like a stairway, only smoother. Today when Jim brought supplies and mail he made the usual landing, then turn to taxi back to where he unloads the plane. Only it went too fast; he cut the motor and it wouldn't slow down, so there was nothing else to do but play cowboy and it was as pretty a piece of rodeo bulldogging as you could see on the

Fourth of July. Guess the man got tired of playing cowboy when he was not wearing spurs; on other trips today he unloaded up the hill where the plane stopped. No more taxi back while the snow is on and the plane wears skis." (Wisner 1987:31).

One winter, a few years later, Frances called out on the backcountry radio for supplies. The weather had been poor for nearly two weeks and she was needy for a few things. As Jim was readying the ski-equipped Travelair to fly, Frances reported by radio that the winds were calm. As Jim was flying down the narrow Salmon River canyon he circled overhead to check the strip before setting up for the landing, noting that the wind sock was hanging straight down, which is a good sign, although the air was turbulent. This puzzled Jim, but he started down river and powered back for a sharp left turn to final approach. Having made the turn for final approach, Jim was committed to landing. As he turned he felt a burst of wind from behind which pushed him up the hill past 'precious' ground. As Jim shoved the Travelair on the ground with force and speed, he noted pine boughs across the runway at the end of the strip. The skis caught the branches and the aircraft came to a stop. Frances was waiting at the top of the strip and greeted Jim with a big grin, saying "I knew you wouldn't land with a tail wind so I tied rocks in the wind sock." Although weighting the wind sock was a very dangerous act, she had enough intelligence to put the pine boughs on the runway to stop the skis, as she wanted Jim to return on future trips. (Larkin story as told to Lori MacNichol, pers. comm. 2002).

In the era when Jim Larkin had his own flying business, he had a boxy Cunningham-Hall which could transport large items as the plane had a very large cargo door. Jim got a call from an outfitter who waited a bit too long in the backcountry; his horses were snowed in at the Sulphur Creek Ranch and he had to get them out. Jim took a veterinarian with him to tranquilize the horses and Jim took a .38 pistol with him, just in case. It took several trips in the ski-equipped plane to remove the horses. Jim said, "It was fine and dandy that the horses were out cold, but I was taking no chances of the horses waking up in flight. So I flew with the .38 at my side." (Larkin story as told to Lori MacNichol, pers. comm. 2002).

Another Jim Larkin story: "I had my most hair-raising close call in Travelair 9038 at Stonebraker Ranch in March 1950. I had flown the roof shoveling crew to the ranch in February. Loose fluffy snow. No problem landing and the old gal reared up in great shape on takeoff. Didn't realize spring thaw had created an icy crust a foot thick for my March touchdown. I was skating 30 miles an hour and in seconds would be mowing down lodgepoles the hard way. [At the] last second, full throttle, full rudder. She switched ends, still going 30 mph, but backwards! Full power saved my bacon; [the] only Travelair to ever have reverse thrust." (Larkin, pers. comm. 2002).

In 1991, the Idaho Department of Aeronautics awarded Jim Larkin for 50 years of safe flying. At that time Jim had flown over 3 million miles, and he is still flying.

CHAPTER 15 WAITING FOR THE MAIL AT BIG CREEK

by Peter Preston

During the summer of 1996, my wife Sally and I were the "volunteer rangers" at the Forest Service station at Big Creek. Until the 1970s, Big Creek had been a ranger station but, as functions changed over time, the former Big Creek District was combined with the Chamberlain and Krassel districts and the district office was moved to McCall. The Forest Service station at Big Creek remained an important outpost at the end of the road, on the edge of the Frank Church - River of No Return Wilderness. Summer residents at the station included a number of trail crew workers who were out in the Wilderness for a week or so at a time. The trail crew workers would come back periodically for a day or two to rest and clean up and to re-provision themselves, then go back out for another work period.

Sally and I were "on station" most of the time. We were comfortably quartered in what had been the ranger's dwelling, which overlooked the Big Creek airstrip, and the horse barn and corral on the far side of the airstrip. One of our jobs was to periodically travel to the three Wilderness trail heads, or entry portals, that could be reached by road, to check on road conditions and camp sites. We were the Forest Service presence at the station to greet visitors and answer their questions about recreational opportunities in the Big Creek area. Another of our jobs, principally accomplished by Sally, was an aircraft landing and take off inventory, conducted several days per week on a random basis. Sally would copy down the tail number, aircraft type, landing or take off time, and purpose for the visit, if that information was available. Periodically, the aircraft tally sheets were sent to McCall, but we never knew what purpose that information served.

Big Creek Airport was (and probably still is) a busy airport, compared to other back-country airports. Although the Big Creek Forest Service station, adjacent Big Creek Lodge, Gillihan's Lodge, and nearby summer residences can be reached by via a tortuous road over Profile Gap from Yellow Pine, the journey out to "civilization" and back takes a full day and is very wearing on body and vehicle. So, Big Creek residents rely heavily on air transport for essential needs.

A few summer residents come and go in their own aircraft, but most rely on the weekly trips by Arnold Aviation, flying the Postal Service circuit from Cascade. Each Wednesday we would anticipate the familiar whine of the turbo-charged Cessna 206, and we would tune our ears to hear the plane before it came into sight. The plane would approach high from the southwest, descend out of sight behind Hogback Ridge, and circle back for a north to south landing, stopping almost in front of our house. Several of us would have gathered at the end of the airstrip, eagerly waiting for our mail and supplies. The pilot would turn his plane around, fanning dust on us, turn the engine off, step out and open the cargo door. Out would come the orange mail bag and boxes of groceries with our names on the boxes. The pilot would be given a grocery list for next week's delivery and off he would go to his next stop, usually Taylor Ranch, sometimes to Cabin Creek, and on to Cold Meadows and Chamberlain before returning to Cascade.

Big Creek Airport is one of the earliest in the backcountry, completed to an 800-foot length in 1933 by the Forest Service, ostensibly to serve the needs of fire control logistics. Up to about 1950, the airstrip was also a pasture for the many horses and mules kept at the ranger station, so aircraft landings up to that time had to be cautious of the livestock. Over the years, the airstrip has been lengthened to 3,550 feet. In 1950 the State of Idaho obtained a permanent lease for the airport from the Forest Service, and about that time the Forest Service livestock was fenced to a pasture on the east side of the airstrip. The airport is now maintained by volunteers of the Idaho Aviation Association. At mid-field, on the west side, is a shed with a tractor-mower for trimming the grass, but during our residence the grass did not require cutting. Opposite the tractor shed is a large-volume water pump and several hundred feet of irrigation pipe with sprinklers but this was not put to use during our residence, either.

Much of the airplane traffic has to do with Big Creek Airport being in a beautiful setting and being a not-too-difficult "wilderness" airstrip for well-trained pilots. As a result, many "tourists" landed at Big Creek for the experience. As Big Creek is at an altitude of 5,743 feet, mid-summer landings and take offs were in the early morning. Marble Mountain keeps the airstrip in deep shadow in the early morning; quite often, before the sun came over the mountain, Sally would take her aircraft landing questionnaire down to the airstrip to greet the early arrival as she was having her first cup of coffee.

The late Jim Townley, who knew every airstrip in the backcountry, had this comment about Big Creek in his notes: "...Does not get more beautiful anywhere in the backcountry than approaching this strip. Early morning (just before sunrise) is usually more exciting when about 35 to 50 elk love to graze on the turf in the middle of the runway. You do not see the runway until short final. During the day when visibility is better the elk hang out in the timber nearby where they do not disturb your advanced go-around technique." (Townley 1995). Sally and I were fortunate to observe the elk on the runway from our kitchen window, as well as other wildlife. Each evening a pack of coyotes came down the mountain behind our house and ran across the runway into the horse pasture, probably to hunt ground squirrels. At the north end of the airstrip a young bull moose lived in a willow thicket, but he rarely ambled onto the runway.

Big Creek was a recovery point for smokejumpers. If they could hike to one of the trail heads, Sally or I would meet them in our pickup truck and take them to the station to wait for a plane, usually the twin engine Otter, to take them back to McCall. Big Creek is also refueling base for Forest Service helicopters, but the heliport was used only a couple of times during our summer as "volunteer rangers."

The summer of 1996 was a memorable one. Of that experience, one sound will remain indelibly recorded: the unique whine of the turbo-charged engine of the mail plane as it approached Big Creek with our groceries and mail.



BIG CREEK AIRSTRIP, CIRCA 1943, LOOKING NORTH. RANGER STATION
COMPLEX AT CENTER RIGHT, BIG CREEK HOTEL IN LEFT FOREGROUND

APPENDIX 1

AIRSTRIPS IN THE CENTRAL IDAHO WILDERNESS

by Peter Preston

This appendix is for backcountry airstrip identification and historical notes, not for aircraft landing instructions or airstrip serviceability. This appendix covers the airstrips generally served by flight operations from McCall and Cascade in the area loosely circumscribed by the Salmon River on the north, the Middle Fork of the Salmon on the east, the Valley County line on the south, and the South Fork of the Salmon on the west, as illustrated on the map in the Introduction. General location maps of the wilderness airstrips are on the following two pages. This appendix is compiled from a number of sources:

airnav.com is an internet web site with official FAA descriptions for selected airports. topo is a notation indicating that the descriptive information was extracted from current small scale USGS topographic maps, where FAA information was not readily available. Fly Idaho is a copyrighted publication, by Galen Hanselman, with detailed pilot's information including virtually all backcountry airstrips, but was not used for this appendix.

Historical notes are from An Outline of the Cultural History of the Frank Church - River of No Return Wilderness by Peter Preston (2001) and other comments from the notes of the late Jim Townley.

Ownership is indicated following name, and other notations:

(USFS) Forest Service, U.S Department of Agriculture

(STATE) Idaho Department of Transportation, Division of Aeronautics

(F&G) Idaho Department of Fish and Game

(PVT) Private airport, no landing without permission

(X) Airport closed or unserviceable

(P) Aerial photo available on the Idaho Aviation Association internet web site:

www.flyidaho.org

Warren - Salmon River Corridor

Warren (USFS)

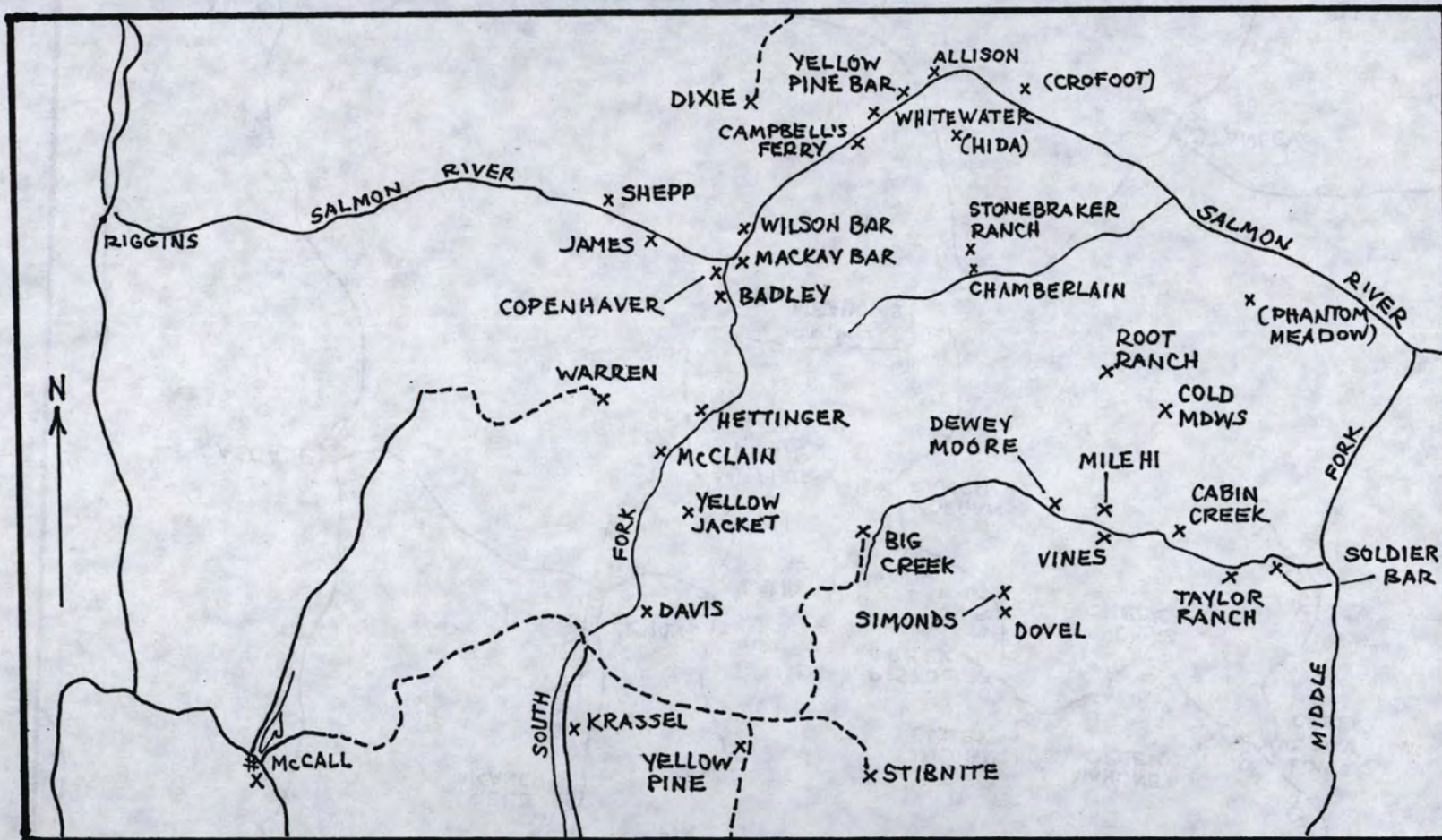
On west edge of historic townsite of Warren, noted for gold discovery in 1862. Airstrip established by 1931. Elevation 5896, used for ski landings for winter mail delivery. Dirt strip fair condition, E-W 2765 x 65 ft. Accessible by road in summer. (airnav.com)

Shepp Ranch (PVT)

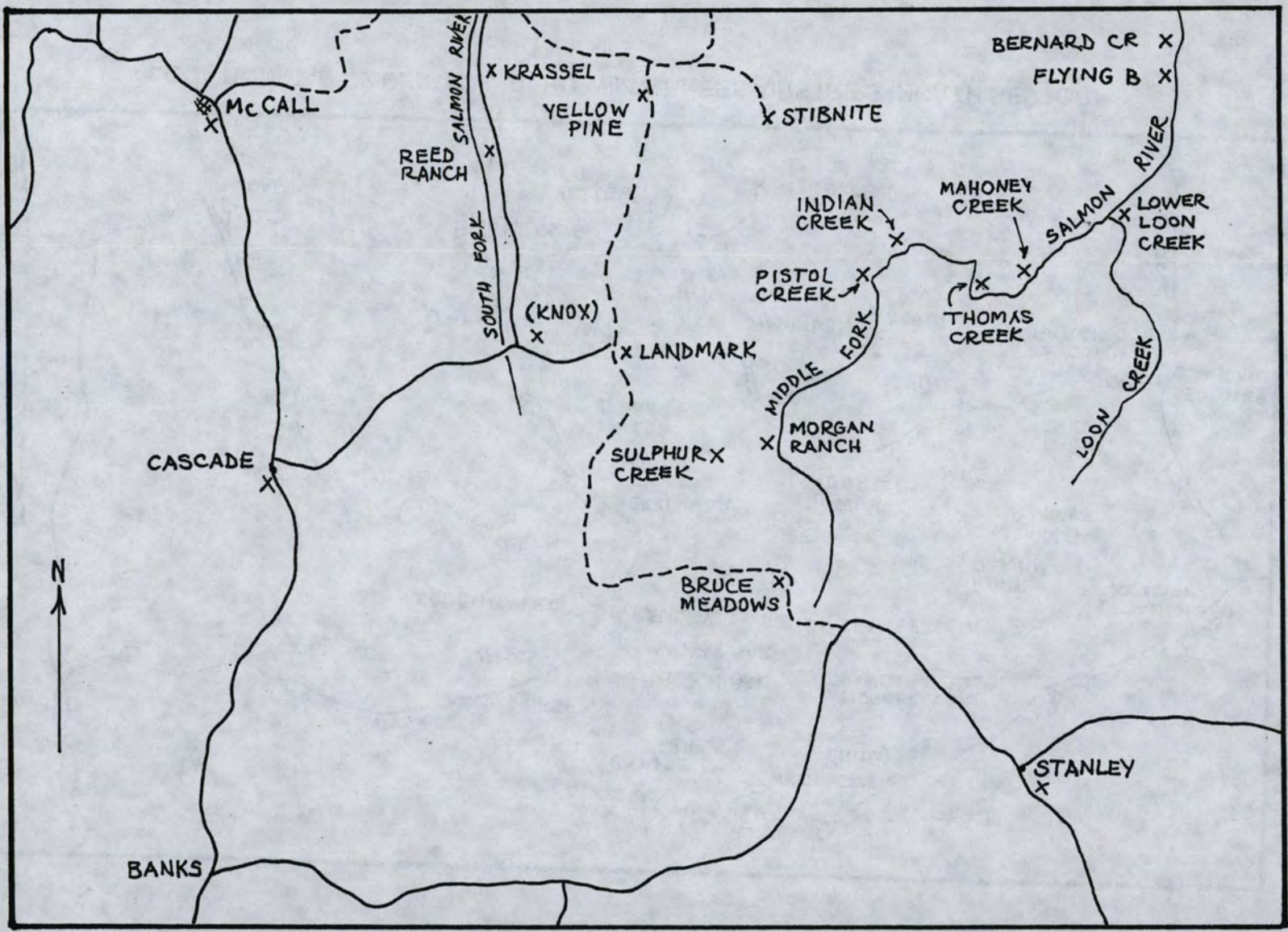
On Nez Perce side of Salmon River, near mouth of Crooked Creek, in narrow canyon. Turf strip 1450 ft, NNE-SSW, elevation 2141 ft at upper end. Serves guest ranch which takes its name from Charlie Shepp who acquired the place in 1909. (topo)

James Ranch (PVT)

On a Salmon River bar, at mouth of James Creek; elevation 2180 ft, NW-SE strip, aprx 750 feet. Site was homestead of Orson James who settled there around 1901. (topo)



LOCATION MAP OF CENTRAL IDAHO WILDERNESS AIRSTRIPS (NORTH SECTOR)



72

LOCATION MAP OF CENTRAL IDAHO WILDERNESS AIRSTRIPS (SOUTH SECTOR)

Mackay Bar (PVT) (P)

On south side of main Salmon River, immediately up river from confluence of South Fork of the Salmon; located on wide natural river bar. Named for William B. Mackay who settled there around 1900, later a cattle ranch and gold mining site. Mackay Bar was first landing strip (1933) in Salmon River canyon, serves very active river boating and fishing lodge. Elevation 2,172 ft, dirt runway 1900 x 200 ft, NE-SW. (airnav.com)

Wilson Bar (USFS)

On north side of Salmon River, two miles up river from Mackay Bar. Turf and gravel airstrip 1500 ft x 50 ft, ENE-WSW, elev 2250 ft; recreational usage, no facilities. Named for Howard "Haywire" Wilson who arrived 1937 to farm the bar and raise a large family there. (flyidaho.com, includes aerial photo).

Campbell's Ferry (PVT)

On Salmon River, on Payette NF side, elevation 2644 ft at top of ESE-WNW strip, aprx 650 ft on 18 percent slope. Strip established 1955 to serve USFS pack bridge construction at 1900 ferry site at the beginning of the Three Blaze Trail to the Thunder Mountain gold mines. In the 1950s the site was the Zaunmiller guest ranch; airstrip is now rarely used. (topo; MacNichol pers. comm 2002)

Whitewater Ranch (PVT)

On Nez Perce side of Salmon River, on east side of Robertson Creek; E-W airstrip aprx 975 ft, elevation 2604 ft, serves a guest ranch which was the 1897 homestead of C. E. Churchill. (topo)

Yellow Pine Bar (PVT)

On Nez Perce side of Salmon River, NE-SW strip aprx 900 ft on river bar at 2250 elevation; Truman Thomas 1924 homestead is now family cabin site of Warren Brown estate (topo)

Allison Ranch (PVT)

On Nez Perce side of Salmon River, on bench between Five Mile and Myers Creeks; airstrip aprx 975 ft NNW-SSE, elevation 2692 ft. Serves guest ranch named for Elmer Allison who acquired the property about 1924 from the Sam Myers estate. (topo)

Crofoot (X, USFS)

At former Crofoot Ranch on Nez Perce side of Salmon River, back off the river on Crofoot Creek; N-S airstrip aprx 975 ft with steep pitch, elevation 3801 at top of strip. Property purchased by USFS and closed the airstrip, but strip is on topo map. Named for Bruce Crofoot who homesteaded the place in 1912. (topo)

Lower South Fork

Copenhaver (PVT)

In South Fork canyon on west side, aprx one mile S of main Salmon River; serves several cabin owners on former Tom Copenhaver Ranch homesteaded 1918. (topo)

Badley Ranch (PVT)

In South Fork canyon on west side, south of mouth of Carlson Creek, N-S strip aprx 750 ft on slope rising from N to S, S end elev 2518 ft; airstrip aprx one mile S of ranch buildings by jeep road (from topo map). Fred Badley bought the place in 1926, hence the name, but it was originally the 1870 James Rains ranch, the place of the "massacre" that began the 1879 Sheepeater War.

Hettinger Ranch (PVT)

Also known as "South Fork;" in South Fork canyon on west side, north side of Smith Creek; E-W aprx 1500 ft, elev 2841 ft at east end, 2969 ft at west end (from topo map). Named for Larry Hettinger who purchased the property in 1944, but was homesteaded by C. F. (Frank) Smith in 1910. Accessible by tortuous road in summer.

Yellow Jacket (PVT)

The name denotes the old Yellow Jacket mine, on the former Hackett Ranch, on N side of Elk Creek road. Airstrip on barren slope, NW-SE, aprx 900 ft, elevation 4100 ft (topo) Accessible by poor road in summer.

Trails End (McClain Ranch) (PVT)

On west side on South Fork, on bench at 3100 ft elevation at mouth of Pony Creek; airstrip aprx 800 ft long, serving summer homes on former McClain Ranch. Site was first settled by Amasa "Pony" Smead in 1872. Accessible by road in summer. (topo)

Chamberlain Basin**Chamberlain (USFS) (P)**

Heavily used airstrip for USFS logistics, hunters, and recreational flyers, at Chamberlain Guard Station, elevation 5765 ft. Principal runway E-W, turf and gravel 4100 ft x 200 ft, good condition; intersecting N-S runway established 1931 in pasture meadow, 2700 ft x 140 ft, poor condition. Name derived from John Chamberlain who had trapper's cabin at the site about 1885. (airnav.com)

Stonebraker Ranch (F&G)

One mile north of Chamberlain Guard Station, in meadow on west side of West Fork of Chamberlain Creek, elevation 5550 ft; aprx 900 ft long, E-W. Not for public use. Named for W. A. Stonebraker who homesteaded the ranch in 1912; first aircraft landing in the backcountry was at this site in 1928 by Nick Mamer from Spokane. (topo)

Root Ranch (PVT)

Owned by Flying Resort Ranches, Inc, which also owns Flying B Ranch on the Middle Fork; 10 miles SE of Chamberlain Guard Station. Elevation 5594 ft, turf airstrip built 1938 in meadow on Whimstick Creek, NNE-SSW, 2100 ft, serves guest ranch. Named for Jesse Root who homesteaded the property in 1912. (topo)

Cold Meadows (USFS) (P)

About 13 miles SE of Chamberlain GS, established by USFS in 1933 as 800 ft airstrip to serve Cold Meadows Guard Station located near south end of airstrip. N-S airstrip

lengthened 1955-57 to 3400 ft, now 4550 x 90 ft. Elevation 7030 ft makes heavy load take offs difficult on warm days. Airstrip heavily used by hunters. (airnav.com)

Hida Ridge (X, USFS)

Abandoned airstrip at north end of Hida Ridge, 9 miles north of Chamberlain GS. Airstrip was E-W, 2200 ft; completed 1941, but never used; trees now grow on former airstrip and is no longer recognizable. (Hockaday 1968:108)

Phantom Meadow (X, USFS)

Airstrip construction began at site 6 miles NNE of Cold Meadows, but abandoned before 1940. (Hockaday 1968:108)

Big Creek Corridor

Big Creek (STATE) (P)

In upper Big Creek valley, adjacent to USFS Big Creek Station. Airstrip built by USFS in 1933, which doubled as a pasture. Airstrip has been extended several times, now 3550 ft x 100 ft, turf and gravel, elevation 5743 ft. Big Creek Lodge is at south end of strip. Airstrip is heavily used by USFS, hunters, and tourists. Maintained for State Division of Aeronautics by members of the Idaho Aviation Association. Accessible by road in summer. (airnav.com; flyidaho.org)

Dewey Moore Ranch (USFS)

Named for Dewey Moore who operated hunting camp near mouth of Acorn Creek, sold to USFS 1979. SE-NW airstrip not maintained, rocky, sometimes water running on strip, 700 feet x 30 feet at 4,494 ft elevation at upper end of 14 percent slope. (topo)

Vines (USFS)

On a little flat on the south side of Big Creek, opposite the mouth of Garden Creek. Named for John Vines who purchased the former 1910 homestead of Arthur Garden, then sold the property to USFS. Elevation 4110 ft, WNW-ESE airstrip about 850 feet long, not maintained (from topo map). The late Jim Townley notes, "Somewhat rocky (6 to 8 inches in diameter); may be in Super Cub territory with tundra tires for the young or experienced and somewhat foolhardy individuals." (Townley 1995)

Mile Hi (F&G)

The Mile Hi "airstrip" is on a bald knob at the head of Garden Creek and was the ranch of that name homesteaded by the Elliott brothers in the 1920s. Lafe Cox had the place for a couple of years, then sold it to Bill Williams who laid out a side hill airstrip about 1949 and subsequently sold it to F&G after cracking up his Fairchild 2W2 on take off. Jim Larkin describes Mile Hi: "We used it for many years with the Travelairs. Touch down by the barn, full throttle up the hill, and line up with the forked tree on take off as you could not see the ground. Its main use is by [pilots proving they are] 'macho man.' Somehow, surviving Mile Hi is a must-have scalp on your belt. I don't use it [any more]. It is so rough you are almost asking for a damaged airplane. One fly-by last year [2001]

had three live airplanes and three dead airplanes scattered around the hill." (Larkin, pers. comm. 2002). The late Jim Townley quotes Rudyard Kipling, "Only mad dogs and Englishmen go out in the mid-day sun;" followed by, "I feel the same applies to pilots using Mile Hi. The usable part of the strip is 540 feet on an up slope of about 18 to 22 percent. The top end of the strip elevation is 5831 feet, while the other end is about a 'mile high.' Do your own math." (Townley 1995)

Cabin Creek (USFS) (P)

On Big Creek at mouth of Cabin Creek. Area was first settled by Caswell brothers in 1890s, then a succession of adjacent owners. A principal owner was Merle "Blackie" Wallace whose pasture was used in 1931 to land a Travelair which was the beginning of fly-in hunters to his Flying W Ranch. Rex Lanham consolidated the properties in 1963 and built the current NNE-SSW airstrip, 1750 x 40 ft, elevation 4289 ft. USFS purchased the property in 1974, removed most of the buildings. (airnav.com)

Taylor Ranch (PVT)

Wilderness research station owned by University of Idaho, College of Natural Resources; named for Jess Taylor who built airstrip 1954 on former homestead of "Cougar Dave" Lewis. Airstrip located on a flat on the south side of Big Creek, between the mouths of Rush and Pioneer Creeks. Strip is good turf, 2300 x 100 ft with a dog leg in the middle. On the approach to this strip, it feels like one can reach out and touch the walls of the canyon. (airnav.com)

Soldier Bar (USFS) (P)

A monument to Pvt. Harry Eagen, who was killed in the 1879 Sheepeater War, is on this airstrip, thus the name. The strip is 1650 x 15 ft, and lies ENE-WSW on a mesa at 4190 ft elevation, on the south side of Big Creek. (airnav.com)

Simonds (USFS)

Named for Leon Simonds who had a mining claim which was denied patent in 1966 and reverted to USFS ownership; the place had been the gold mine of Claude and Elsie Taylor from 1890. Simonds had an airstrip built on the property, on the east side of Monumental Creek, in the bottom of the canyon, surrounded by heavy timber. The NW-SE strip is about 900 ft long, elevation 5343 ft. (topo)

Dovel (PVT)

Named for George Dovel who patented a 40-acre mining claim in 1967 on Monumental Creek about a mile south of Simonds, at the mouth of Talc Creek. Dovel was a pilot and built a N-S airstrip, 1600 ft long, on the west side of Monumental Creek. Property was sold around 1972 to Heinrich Von Staden who maintains a summer home there and uses the airstrip for access. (topo)

South Fork - Yellow Pine Area

Krassel (USFS) (P)

On east side of South Fork of the Salmon, on a bench (elev 3982 ft) up behind the old Krassel Ranger Station, built by CCC 1938. Named for George Krassel, a South Fork

prospector killed by "Deadshot" Reed in 1918. Airstrip heavily used in summer as USFS helicopter base. N-S airstrip, 1500 x 150 ft, good turf, road access. (airnav.com)

Reed Ranch (PVT)

On the east side of the South Fork, on a large mesa, high above the river (elev 4153). Named for William "Deadshot" Reed who homesteaded the property in 1914. Airstrip built by CCC in 1934 to serve nearby road construction camp. Now owned by the Warren Brown estate, but the airstrip is open for public use. N-S dirt airstrip is 2100 x 200 ft, road access. (airnav.com)

Davis Ranch (PVT)

Named for Bonnie Davis, owner of historic Willey Ranch on east side of South Fork, at mouth of Sheep Creek. Ranch has short, difficult side hill airstrip which has been rarely used since ranch buildings burned in 1994 wildfire.

Johnson Creek (Yellow Pine) (STATE) (P)

On west side of Johnson Creek, 3 miles south of Yellow Pine. Good turf airstrip 3400 x 150 ft, N-S, elevation 4933 ft. Heavy use in summer by tourists. Maintained for Idaho Division of Aeronautics by volunteers of Idaho Aviation Association; has access road. (airnav.com)

Stibnite-Meadow Creek (PVT)

Airstrip established 1929 by Bradley Mining Company on Meadow Creek, 8 miles SE of Yellow Pine. Stibnite is the name of one of the extracted ores. Gravel airstrip ENE-WSW is in poor condition, not maintained as mine has ceased operation. Airstrip 2450 ft x 175 ft, elevation 6539 ft. Accessible by road in summer. (airnav.com)

Knox (X, USFS)

Former 1930s landing field in large pasture-meadow at Randall townsite, which later became John Knox ranch. Located near Warm Lake, off north side of Warm Lake road, a short distance east of the South Fork junction. Although not in use for many years, the site has the potential for development as a recreational airstrip. (topo)

Landmark (Pen Basin) (USFS)

Located a mile SE of Landmark Guard Station, near intersection of Warm Lake and Johnson Creek roads. Turf and gravel airstrip N-S, aprx 4550 ft long, elev 6662 ft., on east side of Johnson Creek. An earlier airfield existed in a large meadow area, known as Pen Basin, on west side of Johnson Creek, about a half mile south of current airstrip. (topo)

Middle Fork Salmon River

Bruce Meadows (USFS) (P)

In Bear Valley, named by prospector John Stanley in 1862. Good turf and dirt runway, NE-SW, 5000 ft x 110 ft, elevation 6370 ft. Accessible by road, has picnic tables and shelters, heavy summer tourist use. (airnav.com)

Morgan Ranch (PVT)

On west side of Middle Fork, at mouths of Prospect and Sulphur Creeks. Homesteaded by Jim Fuller in 1904. Purchased in 1949 by Drs. Ben and Freda Morgan, hence the name. Has hot spring swimming pool, large house, tennis courts, aircraft hangar. Continues to be privately used by Morgan children and grandchildren; has permanent caretaker. Turf airstrip 2000 x 100 ft, elevation 5634 ft. (Townley 1995; airnav.com)

Sulphur Creek Lodge (PVT)

Guest lodge on south side of Sulphur Creek, 3 miles west of Morgan Ranch. Former 1920 homestead of Sam Phillips. Popular summer weekend fly-in place. Good gravel and turf E-W airstrip, 3300 ft x 400 ft, elevation 5835 ft. (Townley 1995; airnav.com includes photo).

Pistol Creek (PVT)

On west side of Middle Fork, down river one mile from Pistol Creek, on a bench between Ranch and Garden Creeks. Site occupied beginning 1892, went through several ownerships. Property of 144 acres now subdivided into summer home sites, served by NE-SW airstrip, 2400 ft long, elevation 4796 ft. (topo) (Townley 1995)

Indian Creek (USFS) (P)

On river bar on west side of Middle Fork, upstream from mouth of Indian Creek. USFS guard station and campground at airstrip. During low water periods, the site serves as launching point for river rafters. NE-SW runway is 5000 ft long, can accommodate DC-3. Elevation 4700 ft. (airnav.com)

Thomas Creek (STATE)

On west side of Middle Fork, opposite mouth of Thomas Creek, on a state "school section." Airstrip was built in 1934 by Milton Hood to serve his Middle Fork Lodge across the river, which was purchased in 1943 by Tom McCall, grandson of Tom McCall for whom the town is named. McCall sold the property in 1955 and it is now in private use, no longer a guest lodge. The Thomas Creek ranch has a long history, dating from 1885. The airstrip, however, is on state land and is open to public use. A campground is near the airstrip. The airstrip is gravel in good condition, NNE-SSW, 2100 ft x 75 ft, elevation 4400 ft. (airnav.com; Townley 1995).

Mahoney Creek (USFS)

Named for Ray Mahoney who settled on the place in 1903, attempting to establish an orchard to supply fruit to Thunder Mountain miners. Kinney Cameron patented the place in 1924, which is now owned by Idaho F&G. The Mahoney airstrip is a half mile south of the old homestead, on USFS land. The airstrip, built by USFS in the 1930s, is NNE-SSW, dirt in fair condition, 2150 ft x 15 ft, elevation 4618 ft. (airnav.com)

Lower Loon Creek (Simplot) (F&G) (P)

On east side of Middle Fork at mouth of Loon Creek. Site first occupied in 1869. Bob Ramey homesteaded the place in 1909. The ranch changed ownership a number of times, acquired by the Simplot family, and sold to Idaho F&G. Turf airstrip NW-SE, 1100 ft x 75 ft, elevation 4200 ft. (airnav.com; Townley 1995)

Flying B Ranch (PVT) (P)

On west side of Middle Fork, south of mouth of Bernard Creek. Owned by Flying Resort Ranches, Inc; also owns Root Ranch in Chamberlain Basin. Early homestead site, once owned by pioneer aviator A. A. Bennett, who named the place Flying B. Turf airstrip N-S, 2000 x 100 ft, elevation 3647 ft. (www.flyingresort ranches.com) (airnav.com)

Bernard Creek (USFS) (P)

On west side of Middle Fork, north of mouth of Bernard Creek. Named for Captain Reuben Bernard, commander of Army unit in 1879 Sheepeater War. Airstrip 1900 ft x 150 ft, dirt and turf in fair condition, elevation 3626 ft. (airnav.com)

REFERENCES CITED

- Briggs, A. Eugene
1963 Memoirs of a U.S. Forest Ranger, published by the author, Ogden UT
- Carrey, John, and Cort Conley
1977 The Middle Fork and the Sheepeater War, Back Eddy Books, Cambridge ID
- Cohen, Steve
1995, "Idaho Winter" in Northwest Parks and Wildlife magazine, Volume 5, Number 2, Jan-Feb 1995, Educational Publications Foundation, Florence OR
- Dorris, George
2003 March 3 letter to Larry Kingsbury, USDA Forest Service, McCall ID, forwarded to Peter Preston.
- Dorris, William H.
1995 (Jan 19), Oral History Interview, Idaho State Historical Society, Boise ID
- Ferguson, John P.
1996, Search For The Downed, Heritage Program monograph, USDA Forest Service, Payette National Forest, McCall ID
- Filler, Bud (M.C. Filler)
1999 Two-Man Stick: Memoirs of a Smokejumper, Burning Mountain Press, Boise ID
- Fouch, F. Gordon
1972 Air Operations: Idaho Primitive Area Study, on file in Heritage Program Office, USDA Payette National Forest, McCall ID
- Freeborg, Edward
2001 (August), Crash In The Hills, Environmental Education Program monograph, USDA Forest Service, Payette National Forest, McCall ID (republished from Freeborg's 1943 personal paper)
- Hanselman, Galen
2002 Fly Idaho, QEI Publishing, Hailey ID
- Hart, Arthur A.
1991 Wings Over Idaho, Historic Boise Inc, Boise ID
- Hartnett, Clare A.
1968 Jan 27 letter to Ranger Earl Dodds, Payette National Forest, McCall ID
- Hartung, John
1978 Documentation of Historical Resources in the Big Creek Drainage, Central Idaho, MS Thesis, University of Idaho, Moscow ID
- Hockaday, James
1968 History of the Payette National Forest, Payette National Forest, McCall ID
- Idaho County Free Press, newspaper of Grangeville, Idaho
1931 Issue of Dec 31.
- Idaho Daily Statesman, newspaper of Boise, Idaho
1931 Issue of May 16, Dec 24.
1932 Issue of May 8.
1943 Issue of Feb 18, Feb 19.
- Larson, George C.
1975, "The Salmon River Run," in Flying Magazine, Volume 92, Number 2, August 1975, Ziff-Davis Publishing Co, New York

Larkin, James (Jim)
c1967, unpublished manuscript on Forest Service Region 4 aviation history, on file
in Heritage Program Office, USDA Payette National Forest, McCall ID
2002 March 17 email to Peter Preston

Larkins, William T.
1992, The Ford Tri-Motor: 1926-1992, Schiffer Publishing Ltd, West Chester PA
Lewiston Tribune, newspaper of Lewiston, Idaho
1928 Issues of October 12, 22, 25.
Long Valley Advocate, newspaper of Cascade, Idaho
1999 Issue of Sep 22

MacNichol, Lori
2002 Nov 26 email to Peter Preston pertaining to Jim Larkin accomplishments
Missoulian, newspaper of Missoula, Montana
1968 Issue of Sep 18

Parke, Adelia Routson
1955 Memoirs of an Old Timer, Signal American Press, Weiser ID
Payette Lakes Star-News, newspaper of McCall, Idaho
1943 Issue of Feb 18
1995 Issue of June 22
1999 Issue of Sep 23

Petersen, Duane L.
2002, Valley County: The Way It Was, D&D Books, Cascade ID
Place, Marian Templeton (aka Dale White) and Larry Florek
1953, Tall Timber Pilots, Viking Press, New York

Preston, Peter
2001 An Outline of the Cultural History of the Frank Church - River of No Return
Wilderness, monograph of the Heritage Program, USDA Payette National
Forest, McCall ID

Preston, Sally
2002 Feb 15 interview with Peter Preston

Scott, Dan
2003, January 13; email communication with Peter Preston

Shenon, Philip J., and John C. Reed
1936 "Down Idaho's River of No Return," in National Geographic, Volume LXX,
Number 1, July 1936, Washington DC

Simpson, G. Val
1999 October 14 interview with Peter Preston in McCall ID

Smith, George
1993, Survivor, privately published by the author, Carlsbad CA

Smith, Steve
1988, Fly The Biggest Piece Back, Pictorial Histories Publishing Co, Missoula MT
Spokesman-Review, newspaper of Spokane, Washington
1997 Issue of June 21.

Stonebraker, Walter
2003 Dec 17, personal communication with Peter Preston

Sumner, Nancy
1986 Yellow Pine, Idaho (Third Edition), Published by the author, Tucson AZ

Thompson, Glenn A.

1968 Feb 16 letter to Ranger Earl Dodds, Payette National Forest, McCall ID

Townley, James

1995, unpublished collection of historical and pilotage notes about airstrips in the central Idaho wilderness; on file in the Heritage Office, USDA Payette National Forest, McCall ID

U.S. Dept of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management, Idaho homestead records

Wisner, Frances Zaubmiller

1987 My Mountains: Where the River Still Runs Downhill, (edited by Donna L. Henderson) Idaho County Free Press, Grangeville ID