

The First McCall Smokejumper Base

Richa Wilson, Regional Architectural Historian
US Forest Service, Intermountain Region, Ogden, Utah
2008

HISTORIC OVERVIEW

The subject of this survey is the original McCall Smokejumper Base, now known as the Krassel Yard/Smokejumper Housing Site (referred to hereinafter as the Krassel Yard). The 16.78-acre parcel in McCall, Idaho is bound by Forest Street on the north, Mission Street on the east, Mather Road on the south, and private residential property on the west. It is just south of the historic McCall District Administrative Site, which served as the original Supervisor's Office for the Payette National Forest.



The parcel is in a mixed-use area consisting of residential and light commercial properties, as well as a school to the southeast. The north end of the Krassel Yard is hilly and wooded with mature conifers, while the southern end is fairly flat and open.

The Forest Service acquired the Krassel Yard in two transactions. In October 1935, the northern 10 acres (Lot 7, Section 8 of T18N, R3E) were purchased from Boise Payette Incorporated for \$290.

The deed was recorded on June 1, 1936. In 1938, the Boise-Payette Lumber Company donated the southern end consisting of 6.78 acres and valued at \$350.¹ The latter tract was developed as the McCall Nursery Site to supply tree seedlings for replanting in southwestern Idaho. In 1939, the CCC built a nursery building on site but the start of World War II, with its drain on Forest Service resources, led to the closure of Region 4's nurseries around 1942.²

In 1940, the Forest Service dropped the first smokejumpers to fight fires. This innovative method of quickly attacking fires led to the establishment of the first smokejumper base and training facility in Missoula, Montana. Three years later, in 1943, the agency established two more bases: one in Cave Junction, Oregon and the other in McCall, Idaho at the former tree nursery site. Five jumpers from the Missoula base were sent to the McCall base that year. They

¹ Lands Status Office Records, Region 4 Office, Ogden, Utah.

² Thomas G. Alexander, *The Rise of Multiple-Use Management in the Intermountain West: A History of Region 4 of the Forest Service*, USDA Publication FS-399 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1987), 146.

included John P. Ferguson and Stewart S. "Lloyd" Johnson, along with three Conscientious Objectors: Lester E. Gahler, Jeremias Hofer, and Keith Utterback. Ferguson and Gahler were the first to jump from the McCall Base, attacking the Captain John Creek Fire on the Idaho National Forest on August 14, 1943. Each of the five men made three fire jumps that summer.³

During the next two seasons, Conscientious Objectors (COs) played an important role in the early history of smokejumping. In 1944, 17 of the 19 smokejumpers based in McCall were COs as were 35 of the 37 McCall jumpers in 1945.⁴

The number of smokejumpers grew after World War II, particularly with veteran Army paratroopers. In 1947, the McCall base was designated a training facility and, by the following year, prepared jumpers who were assigned to both the McCall base and the newly established Idaho City base.⁵

Number of Smokejumpers at the Original McCall Smokejumper Base

Year	No.	Year	No.	Year	No.	Year	No.
1943	5	1955	57	1967	57	1979	45
1944	19	1956	55	1968	57	1980	54
1945	37	1957	59	1969	55	1981	59
1946	43	1958	57	1970	55	1982	74
1947	52	1959	54	1971	54	1983	81
1948	52	1960	50	1972	56	1984	77
1949	36	1961	54	1973	53	1985	69
1950	36	1962	50	1974	56	1986	65
1951	44	1963	55	1975	59	1987	69
1952	47	1964	50	1976	50	1988	69
1953	53	1965	50	1977	54		
1954	50	1966	49	1978	53		

Regional forester Evan Kelley remarked, "All parachute jumpers are more or less crazy and just a little bit unbalanced, otherwise they wouldn't be engaged in such a hazardous undertaking." Many individuals associated with the McCall Smokejumper Base exhibited these daring and unconventional characteristics. These traits caught the attention of Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) recruiters:

"Smokejumpers were especially sought after because they already had training in parachuting and air delivery techniques in rough terrain, and they were fit and adventurous. Several of them quickly found work with the CIA as "cargo

³ Leo Cromwell, "Who's Who in Region 4 Smokejumping, 1943-97." (Prepared for the 1998 Smokejumper Reunion.); USDA Forest Service, "History, Payette National Forest," TMs [photocopy]. p. 147, Region 4 History Collection, Ogden, Utah; "Closeup on Region 4's First Smokejumpers," *Intermountain Reporter* (September-October, 1988), 16; and "McCall Smokejumper History," <<http://www.mccallsmokejumpers.org/>>, 4 January 2008.

⁴ Cromwell, "Who's Who in Region 4 Smokejumping, 1943-97."

⁵ Cromwell, "Who's Who in Region 4 Smokejumping, 1943-97."

kickers," men who pushed supplies out of cargo planes, just as they had pushed supplies out of planes to firefighters. Smokejumpers liked working for the CIA because they could jump fires in the United States during the summer and train foreign jumpers or fly overseas missions the rest of the year."⁶

Numerous jumpers from the McCall and Missoula bases served as trainers or "kickers" (dropping supplies from planes) in Laos, Tibet, the Arctic, and other exotic locales. In 1961, many were transferred to Latin America to support the United States' Bay of Pigs operation.⁷ Some became special operations pilots known as "Ravens," who worked covertly during the CIA's "secret war" in Laos. Richard "Paperlegs" Peterson (McCall, 1947-62) and Miles Johnson (McCall, 1953-61), like other smokejumpers, went on to pursue careers with the CIA or other intelligence organizations.

Other notable individuals were associated with the McCall Smokejumper Base. Deanne Shulman overcame discrimination and inconsistent regulations to become the nation's first female smokejumper. She completed her training at McCall in 1981, thus paving the way for other women in this challenging field. Bob Fogg, pilot for the McCall jumpers from 1944 to 1976, served as a member of the Idaho State House of Representatives (1963-65).⁸ Several smokejumpers went on to write about their experiences. Their publications include *Two-Man Stick: Memoirs of a Smokejumper* by Bud Filler and *Jumping Skyward* by Stan Tate.

Site Development, 1943-1956

With the establishment of McCall as a smokejumper base, buildings were needed. Lloyd Johnson, one of the first five jumpers at McCall, remembered recycling buildings since funds were limited:

Our base was started on the forest property above an old nursery building that was used for raising trees. It was abandoned at that time, so we took over this building. A cook shack was set up in one corner of the building. It had an upper story that we set the smokejumpers up in. A parachute loft was constructed to inspect and dry the chutes. We had a pulley system set up to the apex of the building to pull the chutes up for inspection.



⁶ James G. Lewis, *The Forest Service and The Greatest Good: A Centennial History*, (Durham, NC: Forest History Society, 2005), 191.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ National Smokejumper Association, "Obituaries," <<http://www.smokejumpers.com/obituaries/index.php>>, 8 January 2008.

The jumpers acquired surplus CCC buildings from camps "at Lake Fork Creek, near McCall and French Creek, up river from Riggins." Another source states the buildings came from a former CCC Camp/R&R camp for armed services officers on Payette Lake, one block northwest of the "current McCall District Ranger's Office."⁹ The panelized buildings were reassembled and finished inside with wallboard to serve as a barracks, a mess hall, parachute loft building, and fire cache. Johnson recalled, "When the forest supervisor, Jimmy Farrel, would leave town, we would slip out there and build another building because he would never have authorized it if he knew about it. When he came back he would say, 'Well, what's this?' It was a kitchen."¹⁰

Several documents and photographs provide more information about these early buildings, which have since been removed. They are visible in the 1950 film *Telephone Creek*, a 26-minute feature about the McCall smokejumpers available at the Idaho State Historical Society library. Retired smokejumpers described the site in a series of oral history interviews (also available at the ISHS library). Refer to the end of this document for quotations from these interviews. According to available sources, the following buildings comprised the early McCall Smokejumper Base.

1. Lounge. A 1956 site plan places this 20' x 35' building on the northeast corner of the Smokejumper Base on the south side of Forest Street. Its fate is unknown.
2. Fire Hydrant Shed. Little is known about this 6'-3" x 6'-3" structure, which is shown on a 1956 site plan.

3. Fire Cache #1321: Various documents refer to this wood building as the "Old Garage," "Tool Cache," "Supply Room," and "Smokejumper's Ready Room." Measuring 36'-4" x 53'-7", it was moved, reportedly in 1947, from a CCC camp to a spot just north of the current Krassel District Office. Two finished rooms provided storage space (one designated "Supply" and the other



⁹ Jeff Fee, "Smokejumper Housing Development, Report No. PY86-262, 24 February 1986," TMs [photocopy], Heritage Files, Payette National Forest Supervisor's Office, McCall, Idaho.

¹⁰ Leo Cromwell, "He Started the Smokejumper Program in McCall," *Smokejumper Magazine*, April 2006, available at <http://www.smokejumpers.com/smokejumper_magazine/item.php?articles_id=358&magazine_editions_id=31>, 7 January 2008; and "Twenty Years of Smokejumping, 1959?" TMs [photocopy], p. 1, located with Region 4 Architectural Historian, Ogden, Utah.

"Fire Cache") and a third, unfinished portion was a garage with a dirt floor.¹¹ It was the last CCC building on site when it was either removed in 1986 or burned down in April 1988.¹²

4. Paint Shed. This 5'-2" x 5'-2" structure was on site by 1950, as seen in the film *Telephone Creek*. It remained on site as late as 1956.
5. Lower Barracks. This 21'-3" x 71'-0" structure, just west of the Fire Cache, was likely a CCC building. It was there as late as 1956. It may have been removed shortly after the new barracks were built on the hill to the north in 1958.
6. Parachute Loft. This T-shaped building consisted of a 20'-2" x 70'-8" main wing and a 20'-2" x 40'-3" rear extension, both of which were probably surplus CCC structures. Its location corresponded to the current Krassel District Office. Placed on site by 1946, it was likely removed around 1959 when the new parachute loft building was constructed.
7. Privy. The dimensions of this building, 4'-2" x 3'-8", are consistent with the standard R4 Plan 70 pit latrine. It was on site in 1956 but may have been removed when the new parachute loft building was built in 1959.

Class Room/Carpenter Shop. This 30' x 60' building, which appears on a 1956 site plan, was the 1939 nursery building. HWC (probably Harry W. Caughlin) designed the building, which was designated as R4 Plan 41. The structure was characterized by three open bays and three shed dormers on each side of the main gable roof. Lloyd Johnson, who arrived in 1943, recalled "Our base was started on the forest property above an old nursery building that was used for raising trees. It was abandoned at that time, so we took over this building. A cook shack was set up in one corner of the building. It had an upper story that we set the smokejumpers up in." In later years, several smokejumpers recall having classes in the building.

In 1961, HWG (unknown) under the review of Regional Architect William R. Turner, developed architectural plans for the remodeling of the R4 Plan 41, which he labeled "Carpenter Shop." It was likely moved to its current location in the southwest corner of the McCall District Administrative Site at that time. This is supported by the design and bill of materials for a new concrete foundation. As part of the remodeling, the three bays were enclosed.

The former nursery building is now known as the McCall District Warehouse (#1503) and was determined to be a contributing resource on the National Register-listed site. Although not noted in the National Register Nomination, it has special significance as the first building, indeed the only remaining building, associated with the formative years of the McCall Smokejumper Base.

¹¹ Fee.

¹² Wayne Hersel (Payette National Forest Facilities Engineer), personal communication with Richa Wilson, 19 March 2008; and "Soccer Field Special Uses Permit, Report No. PY98-1317, 2 June 1998," TMs [photocopy], Heritage Files, Payette National Forest Supervisor's Office, McCall, Idaho.

8. Upper Barracks/Rec Room #1107. Situated just west of the three 1958 barracks, this 20' x 60' structure was a pre-fabricated metal unit placed on site in 1954 as temporary barracks. Although the Forest Service planned to disassemble it when the other barracks were built, the structure remained on site and served as a recreation space for smokejumpers as late as 1986.¹³ It was removed that year when the current 16-person barracks/recreation room #1198 was built.¹⁴
9. Privy. This 3'-6" x 4'-4" latrine was just north of the Upper Barracks.
10. Kitchen/Mess Hall #1342. Another CCC camp building, this wood structure was reportedly moved in 1946 to a location just west of the current 16-Person Barracks (#1198). Showers and a mess hall were located in the 20'-2" x 135'-8" main building, while a kitchen was set up in 20' x 40' extension of the back. It later served as the Chamberlain Ranger District Office before its consolidation with the Big Creek District.¹⁵ In 1963, a new mess hall was constructed but the building remained on site as late as February 1986. By that time, one wing had been removed. The building was burned down later that year when the site was redeveloped.¹⁶
11. Trailers. Trailers were placed on site in the late 1940s to accommodate married smokejumpers. Measuring 8' x 32', they were located on the hill just north of the main smokejumper compound.¹⁷
12. Site Features. By 1956, site features included pole and woven wire fences, an identification sign along Mission Street, a flagpole, a "sawdust pit, landing trainer," a rope climbing tower, a training rack (probably the "torture rack" recalled by several retired smokejumpers), "let-down and riser trainer poles," and a 15' x 35' jump tower.

Site Development, 1957-1986

As the nation recovered from World War II, funding for government agencies increased. By the mid-1950s, Congressional allocations allowed the Forest Service to embark on a new building program for recreational and administrative facilities. This included new buildings for the smokejumper base, officially known as the "McCall Aerial Protection Unit." The site gained three barracks of R4 Plan A42 (1957-58), eight additional trailers under wood shelters (1957-58), a laundry building (1957-58), and a parachute loft building (1959).¹⁸ This required the removal of several buildings including the original parachute loft building. The new buildings are discussed in detail on the attached survey forms.

¹³ Fee.

¹⁴ Hersel.

¹⁵ Fee.

¹⁶ Hersel.

¹⁷ Fee; A. Glen "Ace" Nielsen, Interview by Troy Reeves and Matt Walker, 2 May 2001, interview OH 1463, transcript, Idaho Oral History Center, Boise, Idaho; and J. Charles "Hawk" Blanton, Interview by Troy Reeves, 21 October 1999, interview OH 1450, transcript, Idaho Oral History Center, Boise, Idaho.

¹⁸ "Twenty Years of Smokejumping," p. 1; 7300 Buildings Files located at Payette National Forest Supervisor's Office, McCall, Idaho; and Facilities records and plans, Engineering, USFS Regional Office, Ogden, Utah.

In 1963-64, Swanson Construction built a mess hall (Building #1603) just north of the Smokejumper Loft. It is referred to in some documents as the kitchen. The design, R4 Plan A-113, is attributed on drawings to "BC." The 1986 IMACS form states "Charles Hummel, architect" is associated with the building.

Smokejumpers built an unauthorized log sauna circa 1965 to ease their aching bodies after strenuous firefighting and training. They were probably responsible for the stone fireplace near the sauna, reportedly built in 1977.¹⁹ Other site features known to exist during this phase include the helicopter landing pad.

A study of the smokejumper program in the late 1970s resulted in staff reductions and the abandonment of smokejumper bases nationwide. The Boise Smokejumper Base was closed and, in 1980, its jumpers transferred to McCall, eventually swelling the crew there from 54 to about 80.²⁰ To accommodate these growing numbers, in 1986 the Forest Service remodeled the three existing barracks (per R4 Plan 298), removed ten trailers with wood covers, and constructed a 16-person barracks (R4 Plan 271).

Additionally, eight new pre-manufactured buildings were placed on site: two duplexes (R4 Plan 283), a two-bedroom house (R4 Plan 284), and five single-bedroom houses (R4 Plan 285). The 16-person barracks was placed on the ridge just north of the smokejumper loft and mess hall, while the other residences were sited below the ridge on the south side of Forest Street.



End of an Era, 1987-Present

As the property became more residential, the Forest Service began developing a modern smokejumper complex adjacent to the McCall Airport at a cost of \$2.9 million. The compound combined functions previously scattered around McCall, including the tanker base, dispatch office, and smokejumper ready room.

After the new McCall Smokejumper Base opened in 1988, the old base was altered. The CCC structures, used since the 1940s, were removed. The parachute loft was significantly altered and converted to a radio shop and fire office for the Krassel Ranger District. Refer to the attached building forms for additional information.

The Payette National Forest consulted with the SHPO in 1991 regarding conversion of the mess hall into the Krassel District Office (Report No. PY-90-433). This was to resolve overcrowding resulting from the district's 1985 consolidation with the Big Creek Ranger District. The work,

¹⁹ "Soccer Field Special Uses Permit, Report No. PY98-1317."

²⁰ "McCall Smokejumper History."

carried out in 1993, included construction of a gable-roofed vestibule and an accessible ramp on the east, replacement of metal windows with wood windows, installation of a metal fascia, replacement of plywood siding with wood lap siding, and site work such as a new parking area, landscaping, and signage.

A day care (R4 Plan 391) was constructed in 1991 and a small storage shed placed on site 1999. Presently, eighteen buildings exist on site:

Bldg No.	Current Building Name (Former Name)	Const. Date
1108	McCall Barracks	1957-58
1109	McCall Barracks	1957-58
1110	McCall Barracks	1957-58
1339	McCall Wash House	1957-58
1501	Radio Shop/ Krassel Fire Office (Loft Building)	1959
1603	Krassel District Office (Mess Hall)	1963
1633	McCall Sauna	1965
1190	McCall Single Bedroom House	1986
1191	McCall Single Bedroom House	1986
1192	McCall Single Bedroom House	1986
1193	McCall Single Bedroom House	1986
1194	McCall Single Bedroom House	1986
1195	McCall Two Bedroom House	1986
1196	McCall Duplex House	1986
1197	McCall Duplex House	1986
1198	McCall 16-Person Barracks (& Rec Room)	1986
1508	Day Care	1991
1413	Storage	1999

DETERMINATION OF ELIGIBILITY

The Krassel Yard/Smokejumper Housing Site, without doubt, played a significant role in wildland firefighting history. As one of the nation's first smokejumper bases, it facilitated innovative practices in natural resources protection beginning in 1943. The property also represents contributions of Conscientious Objectors to the nation's welfare during World War II. Additionally, the site is associated with several pioneers of smokejumping including the nation's first female smokejumper and several jumpers commended for their work with the Central Intelligence Agency.

Despite these significant historical associations, the property is ineligible for listing in the National Register due to a loss of integrity. These include the loss of all buildings from its first phase of development (1943-1956), the drastic alterations or removal of buildings from the site's second phase (1957-1986), and the introduction of 11 new buildings from 1986 to 1991. Additionally, site features such as the helicopter landing pad, an obstacle course, and training features including the tower and a plane body have been removed. The integrity of design, materials, workmanship, and feeling is considerably comprised with these changes and the site no longer portrays the historical associations for which it is significant.

The following cultural resource reports determined the Krassel Yard to be ineligible for listing in the National Register because the buildings were either significantly altered or less than 50 years old. Additionally, no archeological resources were found. SHPO concurred with the determinations.

1. Report No. PY-86-262, Smokejumper Housing Development.
2. Report No. PY-90-424, Construction of USFS Day Care Building.
3. Report No. PY-90-433, Mess Hall to Become the Krassel District Office.
4. Report No. PY-90-438, Removal of Parachute Loft.
5. Report No. PY-98-1317, Soccer Field Special Uses Permit.

RECOLLECTIONS OF BUILDINGS

Lloyd Johnson, one of the first five jumpers to arrive at the McCall Base in 1943, noted:

"We had absolutely nothing to work with here in McCall. With no money, everything that we got was taken out of the forest funds, and they handed out money like you would to your kids as they were growing up. Our base was started on the forest property above an old nursery building that was used for raising trees. It was abandoned at that time, so we took over this building. A cook shack was set up in one corner of the building. It had an upper story that we set the smokejumpers up in. A parachute loft was constructed to inspect and dry the chutes. We had a pulley system set up to the apex of the building to pull the chutes up for inspection. John Ferguson and I were the only trained riggers the first three years.

"The building was a portable military building. When the Great Depression came along, they had to have buildings to house the CCC (Civilian Conservation Corps). So then they shipped in these portable military buildings; they were molded together in sections.

"Up the hill we built a barracks with a basement in it. When the forest supervisor, Jimmy Farrel, would leave town, we would slip out there and build another building because he would never have authorized it if he knew about it. When he came back he would say, 'Well, what's this?' It was a kitchen.

"We got most of the buildings from the CCC camps at Lake Fork Creek, near McCall and French Creek, up river from Riggins. We would go out and tear them down and reassemble them back at McCall. The last of the buildings we got from Gowen Field in Boise. They were already torn apart and lying out in the sun. They were warped and we had a heck of a time putting them back together, but we had to have them. Each panel was about eight foot wide and we bolted them

together. They had 2x4 frames and we put the buildings up and finished them inside. We put up wallboard and covered them with gallons and gallons of paint. We used the spray gun on everything we had; that's what held the buildings together. We painted the floors gray and built lockers for each individual jumper.²¹

Glen "Ace" Nielsen jumped the summers of 1946-48. He described his time at the McCall base in 2001.

When we started jumping up there in '46 the loft was probably 20 yards from our barracks. The kitchen was further away than the parachute loft, back up on a hill. No I guess that first year we jumped the kitchen was right down; we had four main buildings. We had the barracks, the parachute loft, the fire cache where we kept the rations . . .

And I'm not sure, it seems like they did have some quarters for the married couples, some trailer houses and I think that became pretty common and increased in number. They had a location up on a hill for the quarters for married couples.²²

Charles "Hawk" Blanton arrived in 1947 as part of the first group to be trained at McCall, remaining there for four seasons until 1950.

We had a loft where the parachute were repaired and packed. It had sewing machines and that sort of thing for the repair of chutes, and the long packing tables that these chutes were stuck up."

There was a warehouse building that set off to the side were a lot of reject chutes were stored, there was a shower in the old warehouse – not used by the jumpers – was used by the wives who were unlucky enough to be living up there at the time with jumpers who; we had some trailers and there was one or two other residences – I think the residences had showers, the trailers didn't. The trailers, there were three trailers that, were along the ridge between the Forest Service buildings that I mentioned on Lake Street and the smokejumper camp." ". . . the trailers did not have inside water. There was a tap outside that you could get water and no toilet facilities or bathing facilities in the trailers that – and our wives had to go down to the warehouse to shower.

We sort of formed an "L" [shape], the warehouse being on the left if you were facing the loft – the parachute loft – and on the right was what we called our fire cache. And that's where the supplies were kept that we made up our meals for the fire-packs – our fire-packs were kept in there. That's where you first went when you got a fire call to get your fire-pack and your gear. Then you went over to the loft to pick up your chutes. Above that was the barracks and I don't remember how many bunks were in the barracks – a goodly number – which say the

²¹ Cromwell, "He Started the Smokejumper Program in McCall."

²² Nielsen.

barracks probably held at least thirty men. And then beyond the barracks was the cookhouse – and that had the dining room, of course, and the kitchen and where we ate meals when were in a camp.²³

Like Blanton, Leo Compton arrived in 1947, but his career was cut short the following year after an accident.

We had barracks, one-story barracks. There were two barracks, I think we had 45 smokejumpers, I believe it was. They all didn't live there; some were married and they lived in town, lived in various places. We had two barracks and we actually called them up or north, simply because one was a little higher than the other on the hillside. We had a cookhouse.

There was a loft there. We had a training room where they showed some films; and they wanted to get us [together as] a group to talk to us or something, they had a room for that. The fire dispatcher's office was in the main building.²⁴

Another rookie of 1947, Roger Davidson described the interiors of some buildings.

. . . when you arrived at camp first there was a low building on the side loft with a silo effect, and that turned out to be – there were no windows or anything, except the second building had some windows at the top[?] for lighting. And then a small office at the end of this, it was a long narrow building with a loft in the middle and then an office at the end which was a real small office. And then behind it [there was] sort of a meeting room, where maybe you could get 30 or people with chairs and a table, and then the loft. And then as you drove in on your right there was a commissary, which was an old building that was filled with fire tools and rations for the fire. Then the first building west of that was a low barracks that had, I cannot remember what the count would be, was just straight bunks and a locker, bunks and locker, then a restroom on one end. No restroom, but some urinals and some sinks and that was it for that building.

Then again you would go on up a hill and you would come to another barracks which was just the same only placed north and south where that was east and west. Then at the end of that was cook shack and up in the trees; well they were all sort of in the trees. That was the kitchen and the dining hall.²⁵

Bud Filler was a jumper at McCall from 1952 to 1955. He talked about the site in an oral history interview and in his book, *Two-Man Stick: Memoirs of a Smokejumper*:

²³ Blanton.

²⁴ Leo Compton, Interview by Troy Reeves, 27 October 1999, interview OH 1451, transcript, Idaho Oral History Center, Boise, Idaho.

²⁵ Roger Davidson, Interviewed by Troy Reeves, 27 June 2000, interview OH 1580, transcript, Idaho Oral History Center, Boise, Idaho.

There was the parachute loft, and a couple training rooms and that's where the office was. Then right in that same area where it is today there were two army type barracks. . . . In the upper barracks was the cook shack and mess hall. The lower barracks was right next to the fire cache and that's where all the cargo packs were. All wooden structures, it was kind neat.²⁶

Behind the loft were an athletic field, a jump tower, an obstacle course and various pieces of equipment, some resembling medical torture racks. And this is what they were actually called. Two gray-painted wood bunkhouses and the cookhouse squatted across the dirt road from the loft.²⁷

Stan Tate, a McCall Smokejumper from 1953 to 1963, went on to become a minister. He wrote *Jumping Skyward*, a fictional account of smokejumping and ministry. Like others, he remembered several details about the McCall Smokejumper Base.

They had all these old, I believe army surplus buildings or something and they were all painted silver with green roofs. Even the loft was an old building they'd pieced together and built this big loft on one end so they could run the chutes up there. All the buildings were wood, all of them were silver and the ground was manicured because often when we didn't have fire we went around and cleaned up the grounds, mowed the lawn, and did all that. That was down on the flat right across from the high school and there was a baseball field and our training grounds where we had to do all our physical exercise and jump towers and over off to the one side. . . . Up on the hill there were four or five trailer houses that were really small that some of the older men that were married had. As I recall, upper and lower barracks, I think just two barracks again all painted silver with all the beds, showers, and everything. And the most important place of all was the cook shack, which was the highest place on the hill . . .²⁸

Gene Crosby, a jumper in the 1950s remembered specific buildings in 2000.

The fire cache had one whole wall fixed up like a little Mom and Pop grocery store, all kinds of canned foods and whatnot, jelly, butter, fresh bread was stocked there, chocolate type soft drinks, juices, everything really. And you could load your own chow bag.

The barracks we lived in when I first started jumping were older log structures. They were fairly large bungalow types, fairly long. The washrooms and toilets in one end, showers. And then probably 18 or 20 bunks along either wall with a wooden locker in between to hang clothing. They were left over from the CCC days . . .

²⁶ Bud Filler, Interviewed by Troy Reeves, 3 February 2000, interview OH 1454, transcript, Idaho Oral History Center, Boise, Idaho.

²⁷ Bud Filler, *Two-Man Stick: Memoirs of a Smokejumper* (Boise: Burning Mountain Press, 1999), 12.

²⁸ Stan Tate, Interview by Troy Reeves, 22 September 2000, interview OH 1464, transcript, Idaho Oral History Center, Boise, Idaho.

Well the two barracks at that time were the upper barracks and the lower barracks. Later on they put in some metal siding bunkhouses. The site there originally had been the Payette Forest tree nursery where they sprouted and raised little seedlings for transplant. One building was the classroom upstairs and storage and cargo chute packing downstairs was called the nursery. The parachute loft was, I am not sure what its original purpose had been, but I am sure it was also part of that. It was a fairly long building with a tower in one end for the purpose of hanging up parachutes to dry so they could be separated a panel at a time for inspection before they were packed. And gave a chance for all the leaves, bugs, grasshoppers and sticks to shake out, and they could see if there were rips or tears.

Adjacent to that was a large open room with a, well, the first large room I am talking about they had parachute packing tables in there. They were long tables . . . probably 20 to 25 feet long, and it had the equipment to stretch the chute out and separate the lines and put everything into order and be packed on their boards and then have covers stretched over that. Then the large room on the side is where all the sewing machines were, supplies. The older jumpers who had the knowledge made up all of our own harnesses, all the containers, the backpack bags that we went, shovel covers, saw covers, things like that, everything except the chutes themselves.

And above the barracks was the mess hall. That is always the jewel of any camp in my experience.²⁹

Larry Moore was based in McCall when the site was redeveloped.

First we had the mess hall. And then we had three brick barracks, and I am guessing now there was probably, each side there was about six beds, so there were about twelve beds per three brick buildings. Then we had the tin barracks, which was down below. And then my first year jumping then they had the old loft, which was just the old wooden loft. Then they had the garage where our fire cache was, where our food was. . . . I am going to guess at about 1963 is when they built the new barracks, not the new barracks, the new loft, which is not, of course they have a brand new one now out at the airport. But it was real rustic then.³⁰

Robert Montoya, a jumper from the early 1960s to 1979, trained at the McCall base.

I remember that beautiful brand new parachute loft with a big Smokey Bear sign on it. Smokey the Bear on a parachute. And I remember, oh, I will never forget the training area. The training area was here, the loft was here, and there was a baseball diamond . . . And then the barracks and the chow hall. . . . And the

²⁹ H. Gene Crosby, Interview by Troy Reeves, 20 December 2000, interview OH 1883, transcript, Idaho Oral History Center, Boise, Idaho.

³⁰ Larry Moore, Interview by Troy Reeves, 4 January 2001, interview OH 1882, transcript, Idaho Oral History Center, Boise, Idaho.

barracks was like military, the same old mill beds, creaky springs. It was magic, because all the barracks were in the trees up on the hill. And then the tin barracks was the one you wanted to be in because the “machos” stayed in the tin barracks, you know the experienced. Everybody else was in the other barracks. But boy, if you lived in the tin barracks, you had a little bit of clout. . . . all the old guys were in the tin barracks. Anywhere from ten years’, eleven years’ experience because most of them got married rather young.³¹

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Alexander, Thomas G. *The Rise of Multiple-Use Management in the Intermountain West: A History of Region 4 of the Forest Service*. USDA Publication FS-399. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1987.
- Blanton, J. Charles “Hawk.” Interview by Troy Reeves, 21 October 1999. Interview OH 1450, transcript. Idaho Oral History Center, Boise, Idaho.
- "Closeup on Region 4's First Smokejumpers," *Intermountain Reporter* (September-October, 1988), 16-17.
- Compton, Leo. Interview by Troy Reeves, 27 October 1999. Interview OH 1451, transcript. Idaho Oral History Center, Boise, Idaho
- Cromwell, Leo. "He Started the Smokejumper Program in McCall.," *Smokejumper Magazine*, April 2006. Available at http://www.smokejumpers.com/smokejumper_magazine/item.php?articles_id=358&magazine_editions_id=31, 7 January 2008.
- Cromwell, Leo. "Who's Who in Region 4 Smokejumping, 1943-97." Prepared for the 1998 Smokejumper Reunion.
- Crosby, H. Gene. Interview by Troy Reeves, 20 December 2000. Interview OH 1883, transcript. Idaho Oral History Center, Boise, Idaho.
- Davidson, Roger. Interviewed by Troy Reeves, 27 June 2000. Interview OH 1580, transcript. Idaho Oral History Center, Boise, Idaho.
- Fee, Jeff. "Smokejumper Housing Development, Report No. PY86-262, 24 February 1986." TMs [photocopy]. Heritage Files, Payette National Forest Supervisor's Office, McCall, Idaho.
- Filler, Bud. Interviewed by Troy Reeves, 3 February 2000. Interview OH 1454, transcript. Idaho Oral History Center, Boise, Idaho.
- Filler, Bud. *Two-Man Stick: Memoirs of a Smokejumper*. Boise: Burning Mountain Press, 1999.

³¹ Robert Montoya, Interview by Troy Reeves, 6 December 2000, interview OH 1851, transcript, Idaho Oral History Center, Boise, Idaho.

Hersel, Wayne. Payette National Forest Facilities Engineer. Personal communication with Richa Wilson, 19 March 2008.

Lands Status Office Records, Region 4 Office, Ogden, Utah.

Lewis, James G. *The Forest Service and The Greatest Good: A Centennial History*. Durham, NC: Forest History Society, 2005.

"McCall Smokejumper History." <<http://www.mccallsmokejumpers.org/>>, 4 January 2008.

Montoya, Robert. Interview by Troy Reeves, 6 December 2000. Interview OH 1851, transcript. Idaho Oral History Center, Boise, Idaho.

Moore, Larry. Interview by Troy Reeves, 4 January 2001. Interview OH 1882, transcript. Idaho Oral History Center, Boise, Idaho.

National Smokejumper Association. "Obituaries." <http://www.smokejumpers.com/obituaries/index.php>. 8 January 2008.

Nielsen, A. Glen "Ace." Interview by Troy Reeves and Matt Walker, 2 May 2001. Interview OH 1463, transcript. Idaho Oral History Center, Boise, Idaho.

"Soccer Field Special Uses Permit, Report No. PY98-1317, 2 June 1998." TMs [photocopy]. Heritage Files, Payette National Forest Supervisor's Office, McCall, Idaho.

Stanfield, Helen. *Telephone Creek*. 1950. Videocassette, Idaho State Historical Society.

Tate, Stan. Interview by Troy Reeves, 22 September 2000. Interview OH 1464, transcript. Idaho Oral History Center, Boise, Idaho.

"Twenty Years of Smokejumping, 1959?." TMs [photocopy]. Located with Region 4 Architectural Historian, Ogden, Utah.

USDA Forest Service, "History, Payette National Forest." TMs [photocopy]. Region 4 History Collection, Ogden, Utah.