



United States Department of Agriculture

Smokejumpers

'Firefighting's Elite'

GRANGEVILLE SMOKEJUMPERS

In 1951 the Region One jumpers established a base at Grangeville in order to facilitate initial attack operations across the Nez Perce and Clearwater National Forests and adjacent lands.

In 1972 the Nez Perce Forest acquired control of the Grangeville unit, with Geof Hochmuht hired in the spring of 1973 as the first "Grangeville Smokejumper" rookie.



Over 2,500 fires have been staffed by aerial delivery of smokejumpers. In busier seasons, the base has delivered smokejumpers to well over 100 fires.

Over 9,000 fire jumps have been made since the establishment of smokejumper operations in 1951.



Contact:

**Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests
Supervisor's Office**
(208) 935-2513

Grangeville Office
(208) 983-1950

Lochsa-Powell Ranger District
(208) 926-4274 or (208) 942-3113

Moose Creek Ranger District
(208) 926-4258

**North Fork Ranger
District** (208) 476-4541

**Palouse Ranger
District** (208) 875-1131

Red River Ranger District
(208) 842-2245

**Salmon River Ranger
District** (208) 839-2211

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Forest Service

Nez Perce -
Clearwater
National
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THE EARLY YEARS

Not long after the end of World War I, ideas floated around about using aerial fire detection in western forests. Planes had been used for spotting in the war. Why not use them to spot fires in the backcountry? Aerial patrol had its start in 1925.

During these early years, the Forest Service began to think about dropping firefighters by parachutes to fight fires. It wasn't long until they decided to give it a try. At the North Cascades Smokejumper Base in 1939, experiments first began with dummies, then live jumps to determine what conditions the jumpers could safely land in. Fifty-eight experimental jumps were made in all, proving that firefighters could safely parachute into the rugged, timbered mountains to attack wildfires.

THE FIRST SMOKEJUMP

In 1940, the Moose Creek Ranger Station airfield was chosen to serve as the base for the new smokejumper program. A parachute loft was constructed of poles and shakes at the southeast corner of the runway. All seven Region One smokejumpers were stationed at Moose Creek in the program's first year. Moose Creek continued to be used as a jump base through the 1943 fire season when it was moved to Nine Mile outside of Missoula, Montana.



Above: Moose Creek Parachute Loft, Earl Cooley photograph



Earl Cooley, 1940.
Courtesy K.D. Swan



Rufus Robinson, 1940.
USFS photograph.

On July 12, 1940 a fire call came through, requesting the new jumpers to make their first jump to a fire located on the Moose Creek District of the Nez Perce Forest.

Travel Air NC8112 was dispatched to pick up the jumpers. Rufus Robinson of Kooskia, ID and Earl Cooley of Hamilton, MT made the first fire jump in the history of the Forest Service on the Rock Pillar Fire in the Marten Creek drainage.

AIRCRAFT

Johnson Flying Service of Missoula, MT, provided reliable service during the infancy of aerial detection, cargo drops, and smokejumping, and for the following three decades. In 1939 they acquired their sixth Travel Air 6000, which one year later was used on the first jump.

Right: Travel Air 6000, Earl Dodd/R.Holm, Jr.



Below: Ford Tri-Motor, Earnest Scott



The Ford Tri-Motor became the standard jump plane into the 1960s. It was perfect for mountain flying.

In 1946 Johnson purchased a few military surplus Douglas DC-3 cargo planes.



Above: DC-3, Art Seamans

The DC-3 proved useful for the expanded jumper program as it could transport fire crews more efficiently. Later, Twin Otters were added to the lineup and are commonly used today.