



# PONY TRACKS

Newsletter of the Northwest Montana Posse of Westerners

Vol. 8, No. 7

Kalispell, Montana

August 9, 2021

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## AUGUST MEETING

Monday, August 16, 2021

### NOTE OUR NEW MEETING LOCATION

**Topic:** "Early History of the  
Smokejumpers"

**Presenter:** Fred Cooper of Missoula,  
Montana

**Where:** Flathead Electric Cooperative  
Community Room, north end of  
the FEC Administration Building  
2520 Hwy. 2 East, Kalispell, MT

**Time:** 5:15 pm Grab 'n' Greet  
6:00 pm - Dinner (includes the  
presentation)  
7:00 pm - Presentation

**Dinner:** Entree, sides and dessert  
(See website for menu and dinner  
prices - payable at the door)

**Dinner Reservations:** Call (406) 752-9642  
(leave message with names and  
phone number); or send email to  
[kbrittonrn@gmail.com](mailto:kbrittonrn@gmail.com) with the  
same information.

**Reservation Deadline: Wednesday,  
August 11, at 9:00 pm**

Posse members may join the program through  
Zoom by contacting [tim.chris@yahoo.com](mailto:tim.chris@yahoo.com) for  
registration and instructions.

## ABOUT THE PRESENTATION



*Photo courtesy of the National Smokejumper Association*

**A** U.S. Forest Service Ranger saw a Wright Brother's airplane flying overhead in 1909 and wrote that someday, the Forest Service will be using these airplanes.

Thirty years later, after many failed and ultimately successful attempts in using airplanes, the Forest Service was successful in a Parachute Jumping Experiment in 1939. This was the beginning of a smokejumper program that continues today with over 400 smokejumpers employed annually by the Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management.

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Fred Cooper will tell the story of how failed attempts in using airplanes and parachutes ultimately led to the successful use of airplanes and for the dropping of smokejumpers, first called timber jumpers.

He will share with us a silk parachute canopy used in 1939 and main and reserve chutes used in 1941.

### *About the Presenter*

**Fred Cooper** was a smokejumper from 1962 to 1967 in Washington and Oregon. After graduating from Oregon State, he had a career in human resources with the USFS and the Department of Agriculture in Washington, DC.

He is a smokejumper historical researcher and a board member of the National Smokejumper Association, and is in the process of writing a book on the history of the smokejumpers.

### *Don't Miss This Free Movie Aug. 12*



Leading up to this month's presentation, the Posse will be hosting a showing of the 1952 historic movie "Red Skies of Montana"

The film is loosely based on the August 1949 Mann Gulch Fire in Montana.

Presented 6 p.m. Thursday, August 12, in the

Community Room at Flathead Electric Cooperative. It is hosted by the NMPW and sponsored is free to the public.

## FROM THE SHERIFF'S SADDLEBAG



As stated, in last month's Sheriff's Saddlebag column, the Posse's current objective is to financially survive the remainder of the 2021 season and still maintain the Posse's high standards of quality and interesting programs. Our

August Posse meeting will be our standard format with a Grab 'n' Greet social followed by a buffet dinner (catered), and the presentation. As the details of the meal menu and prices are still being 'nailed down,' the updates will only be available on the Posse's website or by contacting Kathy Britton at the Dinner Reservation Desk (see Page 1). Our new meeting location is the Community Room of the Flathead Electric Cooperative in Evergreen on Hwy #2 East.

Immediately after the August Posse meeting, we will reevaluate the format and location of the remaining meetings scheduled in 2021. Please see the Sheriff's Current Status Update for more details on the meal format. Your responses to the Questionnaire are appreciated.

As a promotion to the Posse's Part 1, "Early History of the Smokejumpers," we will be hosting a showing of the 1952 historic movie "Red Skies of Montana" starring Richard Widmark, Constance Smith, Jeffrey Hunter, and Richard Boone. Mark your calendar for Thursday evening, August 12th in the Community Room at Flathead Electric Cooperative.

We are continuing to work with the Montana Veterans Home in Columbia Falls and with the Buffalo Terrace complex in Kalispell for Zooming the Posse programs into their facilities.

We will continue in our spirit of having fun, so historical or hysterical attire will be

promoted at each meeting. Period attire is not mandatory and is entirely optional, of course, but greatly encouraged. Raffle items and history themed book signings will be available during the Grab 'n' Greet session. Hope to see each of you at our June meeting on the 12th and the 16th. **Please bring a friend/ neighbor, a smokejumper, a Hot Shot firefighter, a Fire Boss, a slurry plane pilot, ....or one of each.**

## GENERAL MEETING INFORMATION

**NMPW**'s meetings are held on the 3rd Monday of the month, except the months of December and January, at the Flathead Electric Cooperative Community Room at 2520 Hwy. 2 East.

All meetings begin with a Grab 'n' Greet for a chance to get acquainted, followed by the evening meal, and a presentation pertaining to Western history.

Evening meals are open to both members and non-members. Dinners require advance reservations. Pay for the meals at the door upon arrival.

Walk-in seating will be available free to all Posse members and youths 16 and under and \$5 each for all non-members.

There will be our usual raffle for door prizes. Local history authors will sign books.

## NEW MEMBERS

The following new members recently joined the Posse:

Scott Fisher and Arlis Dailey  
of Columbia Falls, MT  
Mack Mulder of Kalispell, MT  
Brenda Letang of Gildfort, MT  
Terry Atzen and Patty Peck-Atzen  
of Bigfork, MT (reinstated)  
Don and Myrna Hostak  
of Bigfork, MT (reinstated)

## FUTURE PROGRAMS

**September:** Monday, Sept. 20, 2021  
"Glacier Lake Missoula"  
(Part 3 of a Series)

**October:** Monday, Oct. 18, 2021  
"Hungry Horse Dam"  
(Part 1 of a Series)

**November:** Monday, Nov. 15, 2021  
"Herman Schnitzmeyer:  
Homestead Era Photographer"

## CALENDAR OF EVENTS



**M**embers aware of events not listed here are encouraged to contact Ye Editor with the particulars at [richardahull@charter.net](mailto:richardahull@charter.net)

- **August 18:** Slide show of original photos by E. B. Gilliland of Somers. 6 p.m. at the Northwest Montana History Museum. Free admission.
- **September 1:** History Book Club. Mrs. Wheeler Goes to Washington. 2 p.m. at the Northwest Montana History Museum.
- **September 10, 11 & 12:** Montana Ghost Town Preservation Society. Hilton Garden Inn, Kalispell
- **October 8 & 9:** Westerners' International Third Annual Gather and 75th Los Angeles Corral in Los Angeles. Details coming.



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## FROM YE EDITOR'S DESK

By Rick Hull

Photos by Rick Hull



The seven-passenger Travel Air Cabin Monoplane was one of the first fire-fighting aircraft used locally.

The Missoula Smokejumpsers Visitor Center is presently closed, and the Forest Service Museum is currently just a field with outdoor exhibits. But if you are visiting Missoula, the Museum of Mountain Flying is worth a stop. Inside the 18,500 square foot hangar is the DC-3 that dropped the Mann Gulch smokejumpsers in fatal 1949 fire. The restored "Miss Montana" was the topic of the July 2020 Posse presentation.

However there is also a C-47, which is the military twin of the DC-3. Seeing the two planes up close is the only way to grasp their size. Their broad bellies extend seamlessly into the giant wings.

On a smaller scale is the Travel Air Cabin Monoplane. One of the few flying Travel Airs in existence, the 1929 plane was used to drop smokejumpsers.

Among the exhibits are two rotary aircraft engines -- not to be confused with radial engines. Though widely used in World War I, the rotary operates the opposite of other engines. The crankshaft is bolted to the airplane, and the propeller turns with the

engine. The design had some advantages. But it ruled out a throttle, and could only be slowed for landing by switching the engine on and off.

There is also the Liberty engine. Over 14,000 were built during World War I. The 12-cylinder engine could produce 400 horsepower.

The museum's latest restoration project is a World War II Avenger torpedo bomber. It was the heaviest single-engine plane of the war, and played a key role in several naval battles.



The V-12 Liberty engine was used in tanks, as well as WWI aircraft.

The museum is at the Missoula International Airport, though it can be hard to find. Take the airport entrance, but don't enter the terminal parking lot. Instead turn east on "Aviation Way" -- a frontage road paralleling the highway. At the crossroads on the northeast side of the terminal parking, continued straight. The museum is around the corner past the first hangar.



The C-47 is the military version of the famed DC-3.

Admission is \$5, and the museum is open 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. daily from Memorial Day to mid September. The Posse is planning a field trip to the museum in September.

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## TRIVIA QUESTION

**Susan Foster** knew the answer to last month's question about how bears scratching themselves on trees resulted in the naming of a small Flathead Lake community. Below is the story told by William Mooring, an early resident of the Lake Blaine area:

"I would like space in your paper, the Inter Lake, to write about a recent item that told how Bear Dance got its name in 1892.

In 1886, we sour-doughs of the east side of the river had no way of reaching Missoula, our nearest town, without crossing the flathead river at both ends of the lake. We took the matter up with the merchants at Missoula who agreed to furnish the grub and tools if we would furnish the elbow grease and open up a trail on the east shore of the lake.

I believe I am the only one that is left of that pioneer bunch that cut that first trail. Joe Moran was elected captain. Geo. Laken, O. B. Preston, Tom Stanton. Bert Kenedy, Bert and Chet Sheldon, Bill Tilley and one of the Lenard boys and myself were about all the folks that were at home on the east side at that time.

There was a mixed Indian and game trail part of the way, but you know how the Indians savvied that. Any log or obstacle he could jump his horse over, the other fellow could do the same. When we reached the place called Bear Dance, there was a small camp of Kootenais smoking and drying venison. The Indians showed us a tree close to the trail. This tree had a trail beat around it several inches deep in the dirt. The bear would stand on his hind feet and move or dance around the tree and at the same time they would reach up and claw the bark on the tree.

The tree could stand only so much or until the sap was cut off, then the tree would die. I have seen only two or three trees where the bear have held their family gatherings.

With all due respect for Mr. Robins' version of

the naming of Bear Dance, I will say it was known as Bear Dance by the Kootenai and Flathead Indians before my time.

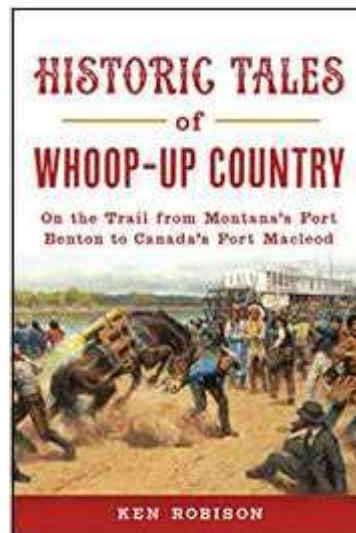
There are a few old sour-doughs in the Flathead that the devil has not got yet and it makes us tired to have some tender-foot who came in after Jim Hill spread his rails try to tell what happened in the making of this little Garden spot we call the Flathead."

### *This Month's Question*

In another effort to evade Google, answer this: How did Political Hill south of Lakeside get its name?

Submit your answer to Ye Editor at [richardahull@charter.net](mailto:richardahull@charter.net) and we will print the names of all those who get it right.

## FROM THE BOOK SHELF



Fort Whoop-Up is just across the border Canada, but it was tied both physically and historically to the steamboat terminal at Fort Benton.

It was first built in 1869 by John Healy and Alfred Hamilton near present-day Lethbridge,

Alberta. The trading post's official name was Fort Hamilton, but it soon became know as Fort Whoop-Up for its liquor sales.

*Historic Tales of Whoop-Up Country* is by Ken Robison, who presented "John Healy: Whiskey Trader" at the Posse's June 2020 meeting. The Fort Benton historian has written a dozen books on Montana history.

The sale of alcohol to Indians was forbidden

on both sides of the border, but enforcement was lacking in western Canada until the Northwest Mounted Police arrived in 1874. The book talks about the role of whiskey in the buffalo robe and wolf pelt exchange. Many tribes would only deal with traders who offered alcohol.

The book sticks to its title by recounting numerous tales of early Montana and Alberta, rather than a strict history of the fort. It barely mentions the Conrad brothers, who were early Fort Benton freight-haulers, and describes a less dramatic story of desperate journey of the Northwest Mounted Police to southern Alberta.

Readers looking to pursue the subject further might pick up *Healy's West* by Gordon Tolton.

Paperback, 2020 \$23.99. 224 pages.



The National Smokejumper Association, through a cadre of volunteers and partnerships, is dedicated to preserving the history and lore of smokejumping, maintaining and restoring our nation's forest resources, and responding to special needs of smokejumper and their families.

[smokejumpers.com](http://smokejumpers.com)

### Posse Gold Stars

Recognizing those members and friends whose generosity has assisted the Posse in so many ways:

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**Smokejumper Exhibits**

# The Montanan Smokejumper Who Rescued Over 50,000 Vietnam War Allies

By Rick Hull

America has a new champion in the Tokyo Olympics, following Sunisa "Sunni" Lee capture of the gold medal in the women's all-around gymnastic event.

The 18-year-old from Minnesota is Hmong, and her mother came to the United States as a refugee. Her family supported the Americans during the Vietnam War, and had to flee when Laos fell to the communists in 1975.

Here lies a tale about a Montana smokejumper who played a major role in bringing tens of thousands of Hmong to America, including to his hometown of Missoula.

His name is Jerry Daniels. Though he died in 1982, his legacy is still revered by the Hmong community.

Daniels' parents moved to Helmville, Montana when he was 10 years old. The farm was without running water, and it and a lifetime of hunting and fishing prepared him for the mountains of Laos. He graduated from Missoula County High School in 1959.

Lying about his age, he became a smokejumper at Missoula at 17 years old. For two years he fought fires in Montana in the summer and New Mexico in the spring. In between, and through out his early career, he attended the University of Montana. It took him nine years to graduate.

It was 1960 when the Central Intelligence Agency came knocking. The agency had long realized that smokejumpers were not only experts in parachutes, but they could handle themselves in rough situations. Daniels went to work for Intermountain Aviation in Marana, Arizona. The firm was a CIA contractor, with connections in Missoula.

One of Daniel's projects was the skyhook recovery system. A line tied to a balloon would be snatched by a B-17 bomber, yanking covert operatives to safety. It was originally developed for a mission to an abandoned Soviet station on an Arctic ice flow, and later appear in a James Bond movie.

Daniels was also operating as "kicker" in Southeast Asia, dropping parachute loads out of cargo planes while ignoring the enemy fire. Some covert operations took him over Tibet.

In 1964 Daniels went to work directly for the CIA. He was based in northeast Thailand, just across the Mekong River from Laos. The U.S. was not officially in Laos. But North Vietnam used it for its Ho Chi Minh trail to supply the communist insurgency in South Vietnam. Laos soon became the most heavily bombed nation in history.

The CIA recruited the Hmong to push back against the North Vietnamese Army. The Hmong lived in the Laotian mountains, and they believed could not live on terrain below 3,000 feet. Hmong were considered hillbillies by other Asians, including by their own countrymen.



The Smokejumpers headquarters in Missoula.

Photo by Rick Hull

In 1969, after finally graduating from college, Daniels became a full-fledged CIA Paramilitary Operations Officer under the call sign of "Hog." He worked directly with Van Pao, a major general in the Laotian Royal Army and the acknowledged leader of the Hmong. Always considered intelligent by his friend, Daniels picked up the Laotian language after a couple weeks.

Initially he was at Na Khang, a small outpost near the North Vietnam border. Daniels became known for shooting marauding rats in his bunker at night. He impressed the Laotian soldiers with his willingness to share in their ordeal, and also willing to eat their meals of bats and monkeys.

Daniel was away at the Laotian capital in 1967, when the North Vietnamese attacked Na Khang. Daniel immediately commandeered a small plane, and convinced the pilot to make a touch-and-go landing under fire. Rolling out of the plane, he juggled radios and began calling in air strikes. He refused orders to leave, saying the Americans' presence was the only thing keeping the Hmong from abandoning the outpost.

Na Khang eventually fell while Daniels was attending the University of Montana. Once back in Laos, he moved to Pao's headquarters was at Long Cheng. The isolated mountain base was supplied by air.

Once, when a Hmong outpost was surrounded by North Vietnamese troops and the defenders were out of water, Daniels responded with special parachutes designed to deploy only during the last 150 feet. But those also drifted out of reach. So he loaded up bags with ice, dropping those directly inside the outpost's perimeter.

The Linebacker II bombing of North Vietnam in 1972 resulted in the Paris Peace Accords, and ended direct American involvement in Southeast Asian.

But it doomed the Laotian government and army.

When the North Vietnam invaded South Vietnam in 1975, the Pathet Lao forces made their own advance, and took over Laos. The new communist government vowed revenge and began rounding up dissidents and wartime opponents.

Daniels oversaw the aerial evacuation of 2,500 panicked Hmong soldiers and family from Long Cheng. However that left over 100,000 who fled to refugee camps in Thailand. Among those fleeing across the Mekong River were the parents of Yeev Thoj, Sunisa Lee's mother, and of her stepfather, John Lee.

Van Pao ended up in Hamilton, Montana, courtesy of Daniel, and above the 3,000-foot elevation threshold that Hmong felt they needed to survive. However most were stuck at the CIA-funded refugee camp at Ban Vinai in Thailand.

Many, including the Thais, wondered if the Hmong would be able to adapt to modern life outside of the mountains.

Daniels had faith. Appointed as Ethnic Affairs Officer, he worked at screening Hmong refugee for resettlement in the United States. Among the issues were getting Hmong officially married, and dealing with husbands with two wives. He had to also document the past military service of Hmong in a society that was largely illiterate.

It was estimated that he was responsible for resettling 53,700 Laotians between 1975 and 1982. It was a job he found frustrating, and he talked to friends about his dream of moving to his Montana property and mining gold.

Daniels died unexpected at age 41 in Bangkok, Thailand. It wasn't an enemy bullet, but carbon monoxide poisoning from a malfunctioning water heater. Because his body had not been discovered for several days, it was returned to Missoula for burial in a sealed coffin. Theories circulated that his death



was faked, along with speculation that he may have been assassinated or committed suicide. A 2017 DNA test confirmed that the body was Daniel.

An elaborate three-day funeral was held in Missoula, attended by Hmong throughout the country. Many Hmong communities collected donations of \$2 and \$3 each and sent the accumulated money to the family.

Originally many of the Laotians lived in the Bitterroot Valley in Montana. However they discovered they could thrive at lower elevations, and since settled throughout the United States.

Now 330,000 Hmong live in the United States. Among them is Sunisa Lee, whose mother, Yeev Thoj, arrived in St. Paul, Minnesota, with her mother and older sister. In 1987.



\_\_\_\_ "Jump'n Chutes" by Cherie Cooper, colored pencil artist, 2013.  
DC-3 jump plane jumping into the Montana sky showing  
parachutes that have used during the history of smokejumping  
from 1938 to the present day.

This issue of Pony Tracks is Volume 8, Number 7.

Pony Tracks is published monthly except December and January by the  
**NORTHWEST MONTANA POSSE OF WESTERNERS**  
c/o Clerk of the Posse, P. O. Box 10811, Kalispell, MT 59904.  
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The next issue of Pony Tracks will be issued September 2021 (or thereabouts).

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