

SOME OF THE MEN OF MANN GULCH

Compiled and edited by

Starr Jenkins

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Eldon Diettert



Bob Bennett

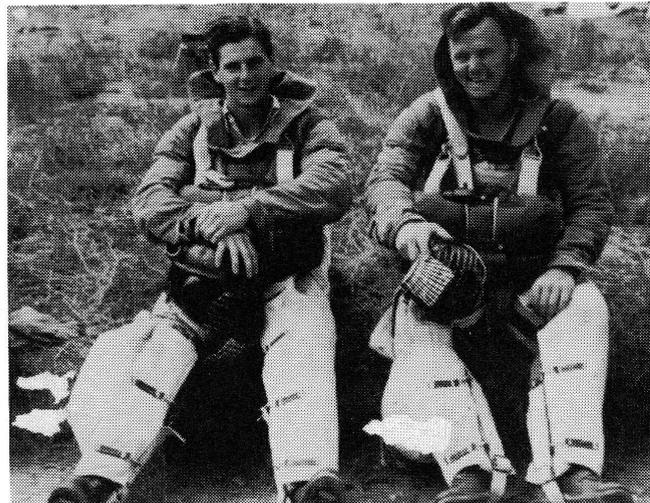


Phil McVey



Chuck Pickard

Stan Reba



Jim Harrison, 1948



Joe Sylvia



Skip Stratton

Ed Eggen

Bill Dratz

Bill Hellman



After their ceremonial jump near the White House in Washington, 6/28/49



Restored Ford Tri-motor at Mann Gulch Memorial Dedication, Aerial Fire Depot, Missoula Airport, 5/8/91

Some of the Men of Mann Gulch

"They were young and did not leave much behind them and need someone to remember them."

Norman Maclean, Young Men and Fire, page 102.

Since Norman Maclean did not tell much about the individual men who died at Mann Gulch in his otherwise excellent book, in the fall of '92 I began writing to relatives and friends of those men to ask them to send me brief biographies of their loved ones so that the world could have a better understanding of these men: who they were, what they had done, what they were like and what they had dreamed of doing in their lives. Though not all the relatives or friends were locateable after all these years, the responses from those that were have been gratifying. These people have not only written well but have granted me permission to edit and publish their recollections of their loved ones here. Here then is the memorial collection so far assembled in the words of the people who knew. Perhaps other friends and relatives will be found to soon complete this small anthology.

Starr Jenkins,
San Luis Obispo, Spring, 1993

Bob Bennett

A composite sketch by . . .
Joyce B. Russell [with help from Gary P. Bennett]:

Robert James Bennett was born March 18, 1927, and from all reports was a delight to the family. He was my older brother, the third of four children born to Robert Guy and Annie Moses Bennett of Paris, Tennessee. His older siblings were Jeanne Moses Bennett (now Sharber) and Maurice Guy Bennett, now deceased. Dr. Augustus Oliver, family physician, friend and neighbor, ushered Robert into the world and saw him through the usual childhood illnesses and one life-threatening bout with diphtheria when he was four.

Bob was a good brother, son and human being---one of those rare people who truly cared about others and exhibited excellent character traits throughout life. He attended Sunday School and worship services, joining the First Christian Church in Paris. He completed elementary school in the same town, and we chased lightning bugs, wove clover chains, played Hide and Seek, Red Rover, Tag, and other childhood games. When I climbed the gnarly apple tree in our backyard and panic struck, it was Bob's steady hand which guided me safely to the ground again.

Bob did most of the things boys did then. He had a paper route, built and flew kites, made model airplanes, and experimented with chemistry and woodburning sets. Lest anyone polish a premature halo for him, however, he also started a grass fire near the garage, experimenting with matches and frightening our mother to near hysterics. His mind was curious but never vicious. He dropped a tiny piece of tobacco into my sister's eye once to see what would happen and was shocked when she reacted so quickly and so loudly. Another time, he called to me (in that same backyard), "Stop or I'll shoot!" I blithely kept running, never believing for a minute that my older brother, my guide and protector, would actually do such a thing with his new BB gun. But temptation overcame him. When the BB struck my back, not even penetrating my clothing, I howled mightily, sure that I was mortally wounded. He was properly contrite because this aberration had been a rare exception to his kind and generous nature.

Bob's interest in the outdoors was always there. He played football in high school as a center and worked hard and consistently. It was about this time that a classmate of his who had a crush on him made friends with me in order to visit our home. She was a sweet honest girl who told me of her infatuation and we remained friends. She visited our home after Bob died and grieved with us.

Bob was reserved and had a quiet strength of character. He was an honorable person with a good sense of humor. He was not preachy or better-than-thou, but was a fine young man.

Just after graduating from high school, Bob joined the Army on May 31, 1945. He was a member of the 29th General Medical Corps stationed with the occupation forces in Japan. While serving also in Korea, he attained the rank of staff sergeant. He was honorably discharged from the Army on Christmas day, 1946.

After his service, using the GI Bill, he enrolled in the University of Montana at Missoula because of its reputation for having a fine forestry program. The study of forestry had been his goal since childhood. His letters from Montana told us of his life there, his introduction to the ski slopes and friends he had met. One was Leonard Piper, who died with him at Mann Gulch. Bob was looking forward to his junior year at the U. and knew his smokejumper's pay would help.

This, of course, was not to be. Mann Gulch, August 5, 1949, happened instead. Bob will always be an excellent man in my memory and an important part of my past to be cherished.

Barbara Bigham Simons:

Robert Bennett was my schoolmate for as far back as I can remember. Because our last names both began with B, we always sat close together in class. I can't say that he dunked my pigtails in the ink-well because I neither had pigtails nor was he inclined to do such things.

He was intelligent, studious, quiet and unassuming, very courteous, pleasant and well-liked by everyone. By the time we were in high school we were calling him Bob rather than Robert. I always felt that he would do well in anything that he undertook. However, I never imagined that Bob would aspire to such a dangerous career as being a firefighter in the Forestry Service. He gave his life courageously while

serving his country. I'm proud to have counted him a good friend.

Ms. Bobbie Parker:

We lived across the street from the Bennett family from about 1943 on. Joyce and I became fast friends and are to this day. I remember Robert as a quiet, shy boy with a sweet smile, well-liked by all who knew him.

I will never forget hearing on the radio of the danger of the forest fire in Montana and seeing Mrs. Bennett's worry.

Then I remember the flag-draped casket being carried up the porch steps to the front hall of the Bennett home. We knew we had all lost a good man and a good friend then.

Mrs. Lucille Long:

Bob Bennett, my brother-in-law, was a kind, thoughtful young man. When Pearl Harbor was bombed, my planned marriage to Bob's brother Maurice (who was in the Navy) was delayed three years because of the war. Robert and all the Bennetts were very kind to me. I visited their home often as I was very lonely. I worked at the Paris 5 & 10 Cents Store. Robert would come to Fry's Drug Store and have a Coke with me at the soda fountain while I ate my lunch. He was a polite, good-looking boy with a kind smile, and he was dearly loved by all his family and me.

I can remember his mother, who was in ill health at the time, hearing on the radio about the forest fire, and being so worried about Robert. Then later the Western Union boy knocked at the door. We all knew then. His father called the family doctor before they read the message to her. The whole town of Paris, Tennessee, was saddened by her loss.

Bob Sallee's letter to Bob Bennett's mother, Mrs. Annie Bennett:

I'm glad you have written to me as I have been wanting to tell you about Bob. The smokejumpers are some of the best fellows in the world and your son was one of the best-liked men in camp. Several of the fellows came to me after I came back from that fire and

asked if Bob had been along. I shall never forget the look of shock and pain on their faces when I told them that he had.

Of the men who died at Mann Gulch, Bob was the only one who showed any sign of using his head and thinking out a way or method which might have meant survival for him. He took refuge in an open spot where there was nothing but grass. There he lay face down and gambled that the flames would go through the grass so fast that he would not burn. But God had decided it was Bob's time to come. He died without suffering because there is no pain from a hemorrhage of the lungs.

Your son is a hero. All men who die protecting something they love are heroes. Bob loved the forests very much. He died in a war that is as great as any other war ever fought on this earth. The war man fights against the eternal enemy of the forest---fire.

Your pastor is right. Bob lives. He lives in the hearts of every man, woman and child that loves the forests.

A Brief Biography of Eldon Eugene Diettert
By Gerald A. Diettert, M.D.

Eldon was born August 5, 1930, in Moscow, Idaho, the second son of Reuben and Charlotte Diettert. Father was an assistant professor in Botany at the University of Idaho, Mother a housewife. Eldon was the only one in the family who had naturally curly hair and his mother allowed it to grow without cutting until it was shoulder length (about like Shirley Temple's). Frequently the mailman would tease Eldon about this, calling him a "little girl." One day, when Eldon was about three, following such taunting, he kicked the man in the shins and proclaimed, "I'm not a little girl." When he was four, I took him to the Saturday morning movie series, "Buster Brown and his Dog" several times. Eldon always cried because he was afraid of "the dog" and had to be returned home, much to my disgust.

When Eldon was five, the family moved to Iowa City, Iowa, where his father returned to school to obtain his Ph.D. in Botany. During this time the family lived in several apartments. While Father was in school, Mother did custodial work at the School of Dentistry. Father did his doctoral thesis on sagebrush and engaged his two sons in sanding and polishing sections of sagebrush for his project. The family spent their summers on Grandfather Diettert's farm near North Judson, Indiana, where Grandmother tried to fatten the brothers on cream and whole milk and gave them chickens to raise, then served them the birds at dinner before their departure for home at summer's end. Some time was also spent on Grandfather Thompson's farm near Lafayette, Indiana.

Two years later, in 1937, the family moved to Missoula, Montana, where Father became a member, and subsequently chairman, of the Botany Department at the University of Montana. Soon after this move, both brothers obtained magazine routes, selling such periodicals as LIBERTY, TRUE CONFESSIONS and TRUE DETECTIVE. Eldon continued his route (actually an area of town considered to be his "property" to solicit for customers) throughout grade school and was very conscientious and punctual with his customers. Some of the money earned went to supplement the family income but part was saved "for college."

At Paxson Elementary School, Eldon was an excellent student and received high marks. He was well liked by his teachers and fellow students. In contrast to his brother who was three years older and very protective of him, he never got into any fights. He was a member of Cub Scout Pack 1, Den 2 but did not continue in the Boy Scout program. He participated in a music program at the university, learning to play the clarinet. During the summers the family picked huckleberries to supplement their income. Another adventure in the woods occurred when he was about nine: he and his brother climbed about 2000 feet to a saddle in Mount Sentinel just east of the campus and cut down a Christmas tree that measured about 4 inches through at the butt. The top fifteen feet was carried home where Father shortened it again so it would fit into the house.

Eldon liked to build model airplanes, powered by rubber bands, and after they had crashed and been repaired repeatedly, they were set on fire and launched from the second story bedroom window to "go down in flames." Luckily the house did not burn down from these aerial funeral pyres.

In 1939 Eldon's sister, Doris Jean, was born. Over the next ten years, Eldon became her chief protector, looking after her every need and taking her to movies and other local events.

During the summers at age nine and ten, Eldon helped me mow and water neighborhood lawns. Sometimes the grass was so tall Eldon pulled on a rope tied to the mower while I pushed. Eldon took over the lawn jobs on his own when eleven and twelve. Following this, he worked intermittently after school and summers at the K&W Grocery Store, delivering groceries and stocking shelves. He was studious in high school and, though he was tall, 6'3" and very strong, he did not participate in sports.

Our family took vacation trips to Glacier National Park and other camping spots. With his father's encouragement Eldon became an avid dry-fly trout fisherman in his teens.

In the summers of 1947 and 1948 he worked for the U.S. Forest Service in the Blister Rust Control program at Camp Nowhere in northern Idaho. By the fall of 1948 he had decided that forestry would be his calling and he enrolled at the University of Montana where he continued to be a scholar and was on the high honor roll each quarter. Father bragged that Eldon was one of the best forestry students he had ever taught, but

Father was felt to be a bit prejudiced.

Eldon was very excited about and challenged by the smokejumper program and viewed it as a great opportunity in his chosen career. He was called away from his nineteenth birthday luncheon to go to the Mann Gulch fire.

In the fall of 1949, Wag Dodge took me, Eldon's brother, up to Mann Gulch to view the fire scene and the site of Eldon's death. I realize now what an emotional strain that must have been on Wag.

In Young Men and Fire, Maclean referred to a family that never spoke about their loss after the fire. I believe that was our family. In deference to my mother's grief, the fire was never discussed and one treaded lightly in even recalling episodes in his life--a real shame, and unfair to him and his goodness---and unfair to all of us in remembering and talking about his short time with us with happiness.

Eldon Diettert did not live long enough to do any noteworthy accomplishments. His story is really that of an above-average American boy growing up in the Depression years, with his great promise unfulfilled. One sad mistake took away his life.

Bill Hellman

as described by his widow, the later Mrs. Gerry McHenry

I did receive a complimentary copy of Norman Maclean's book, but there were parts of it that I was perturbed about, and some of the information in the book was incorrect. One thing was that I was not just pregnant; Bill and I did have a son born on June 27, 1949. This child died a few months later, in November 1949, of a ruptured diaphragm. Another thing that bothered me was the fact that Maclean stated that Bill could not remember his prayers. Bill was raised a Catholic and he had married outside his church, but prayers are not something you forget how to do. Also I question Maclean's statement that Wag Dodge did not know the names of the smokejumpers in his crew. For me this passage gave the impression that Wag Dodge was the foreman and the others were of little importance so he didn't bother to learn their names. As for the backfire Wag set in order to provide a safe escape area: With the heavy roar of the fire no one could have heard what he was telling them to do anyway. These were just a few of the things that were upsetting about his book. Now as to Bill's life:

William J. "Bill" Hellman was born August 3, 1925 in Kalispell, Montana. So his 24th birthday was just two days before Mann Gulch---when you lucky four jumped into Yellowstone and the unlucky four, including Bill, returned to Missoula in time to catch the Mann Gulch fire two days later.

Bill would have graduated from Flathead County High School with the class of 1943, but he volunteered for the Navy at the age of seventeen. He served with the Navy for two years and then transferred to the Marines, being trained as a combat medical corpsman. As such he took part in many island-hopping invasions in the Pacific. He also served for a time in occupied Japan. Upon his discharge from the service, after his first summer of smokejumping, he and I were married on September 18, 1946, here in Kalispell, Montana. My name then was Geraldine Mather before I became Mrs. Bill Hellman. He enrolled in the University of Montana at Missoula, attended there for two years, then attended Montana State College at Havre, Montana, as well as Greeley State Teachers College at Greeley,

Colorado. By the summer of '49 he had but three months of training to complete before he would have earned his degree. His plans were to become a science and botany teacher.

Bill also took part in the Forest Service ceremonial parachute jump as one of a select group of four experienced squadleader jumpers in front of the White House in Washington, D.C., on June 28, 1949. He had been hesitant to go, as we were expecting our first child to be born any day; but we felt it was a great honor to be asked, so he did go and our son was born the day before his jump, on June 27, 1949.

Bill's father, James Hellman, was also employed by the Forest Service, and did retire from the Forest Service.

Another comment made in Maclean's book many times was about the smokejumpers drinking at all hours and carousing with low class women. The only thing I have to say about that is I guess we didn't know any of those men that Maclean pretended to know. All the ones we knew were working in the summer for the money so they could go to school in the fall, winter and spring; and most of them were going to college under the G.I. Bill program. And they were working too hard to spend much time drinking and carousing.

The only smokejumper that I knew that was killed along with Bill was Henry Thol, Jr. Henry and I grew up in the same neighborhood. Of course his father was terribly upset, especially with his knowledge [as a retired forest ranger] of working in the woods. He felt they had made very poor judgment on this fire, which I am sure was true. Henry Thol, Jr., was a fine young man. He came from an excellent family.

I would like to say that Bill was a great husband, and I am sure he would have made a good father. I have been lucky again with my second marriage to another outstanding man. Of course I am prejudiced about all this.

I am enclosing some addresses of former smokejumpers who were friends of Bill's if you should wish to contact them.... If I can be of any further help to you, please let me know. We do appreciate what you are trying to do.

Dave Navon

by Anita Navon (a composite of several letters)

My older brother, David Richard Navon, was born in 1920 in Argentina where my dad, already an American for many years, was selling farm machinery for International Harvester out of Chicago. My parents soon returned to the U.S. and bought farmland in the Central Valley of California where we were raised. After Dad lost the farm in the Depression, in 1935 we moved to the bigger town of Modesto where David finished high school in 1938. Seeking relief from the hum-drum, David "ran away to sea," working his way around the world for a year on a Swedish freighter. He returned in 1939 and entered Modesto Junior College, soon joining the National Guard to have some work income and military training. When President Roosevelt responded to Hitler's rampages in Europe by mobilizing the National Guard in 1941, David was taken into the Army. And the war soon came.

David made it through Officer Candidate School in 1942 and as a second lieutenant volunteered for paratrooper training. Eventually he was sent to England and was with the 82nd Airborne Division when it jumped into Holland in the fall of 1944 (at Nijmegen--- as described in the book A Bridge Too Far). He was wounded in that battle and invalided back to England just before the Battle of the Bulge. After the war ended, having recovered, he was in the Army of Occupation in Berlin, attached to the 101st Airborne Division. When he was honorably discharged in March 1946, after five years in service, he held the rank of first lieutenant.

He then enrolled at the University of California, Berkeley, majoring in forestry. He spent the 1947-48 school year at the University of Aberdeen (Scotland) School of Forestry, and returned to Cal to graduate with his forestry degree in June 1949.

Our last meeting together was an outing to the San Francisco (De Young) Art Museum. David was a museum-goer, and a book-reader, and as long as I can remember he and my father kept a stamp collection. His letters home, from wherever he was in the world, usually had some beautiful stamps.

Now some comments on the effects on me of reading Norman Maclean's Young Men and Fire:

My first response was, though it hurt to read it, it was altogether a wonderful book for me. The book was a real catharsis for my long-unfinished grief about David. Maclean helped me accompany the men to the end and to be inside their shoes. I was moved by his dedication and the fact that he cared so much about the lives of the people we loved.

A later, perhaps much more minor reaction was my irritation at Maclean for presenting David, inaccurately it seems to me, as "a free wheeler," a "professional adventurer," who was somewhat bossy among the younger men and who didn't mind striking off on his own without authority to do so whenever the impulse struck him. [Don't forget that all fifteen of Dodge's crew did that when they had no idea why he was lighting that escape fire.]

David was intent on a career in forestry. He had taken the summer job--he said it was going to be the last jumping he would do---to earn money; he was sending me checks to help me go to Europe in the fall. He loved the outdoor life, and was serious about establishing himself. His letters were enthusiastic about parts of the Montana country he had seen, and about the fact that he had been given some real forest work to do, cruising timber.

Yet overall I can't help but be grateful to Maclean for writing his book and helping me and millions of others be "inside our loved-ones' shoes" out on that mountain.

[End of Anita's sketch of David]

Two afterthoughts on Dave Navon by the editor:

One episode of the summer of '49 showed how serious Dave was about learning his forestry: Short Hall, of Colorado A & M (Fort Collins), had a war-surplus Jeep he had just bought and was refurbishing in the evenings around camp. On a weekend he invited two other forestry-student jumpers, Dave Navon and Jock Fleming, and me to ride with him out to the Powell Ranger Station on the west side of the Bitterroot Divide; i.e., just into Idaho. (That was before the Lewis and Clark highway had been completed down the Lochsa, cutting through a vast area of wilderness.) Short Hall as always wanted to see some new, nearly

untouched country; but he and the other two foresters also wanted to make that 100 mile drive to get into a watershed they had never seen before to get their first real look at a Western White Pine---the great wood for matches and toothpicks---important items for macho western men. I was along to enjoy the country too and to witness these three budding foresters' great enthusiasm when they spotted their first one. "There it is!" "Yeah. Hey, ain't that neat!" A marvelous lumber tree that is getting harder and harder to find in our nation's dwindling forests.

I believe Dave told me he was planning to return to U.C. Berkeley to get a Master's degree in Range Management---to strengthen his qualifications for a Forest Service or other land management career. Yet one of his more wild dreams was to persuade the wealthy owner of some large California-coast island to let him manage that island as a big-game hunting preserve---where exotic species would be introduced and where well-off hunters could come "on safari" to hunt lions, tigers, Kodiak bears, rhinos, whatever he could get the owners to introduce and maintain on such a miniature wild world. Luckily perhaps the National Park Service and the Nature Conservancy beat him to it with better ideas. But imagine; hunting Bengal tigers just thirty minutes from downtown Los Angeles. The company would have never run out of customers.

Bits and Pieces of Stanley Reba's Life
by Mrs. Andre Anderson, sister-in-law

Stanley J. Reba was born October 15, 1923 in Brooklyn, New York. Both of his parents, as best as I can remember, were Polish immigrants. His father, Walter Reba, was very conservative and strict, definitely the head of the household. Stan had an older sister, Catherine, and a younger sister, Adeline. Their address at the time of Stan's death was 96 Newell Street, Brooklyn. This was I believe the residence of Stan's boyhood.

I do not know where he attended grade school but he graduated from Brooklyn Boys' High School, a Christian Brothers school. He received a football scholarship to Holy Cross College in Massachusetts and took his freshman year there. It was at this time that he joined the Army Air Corps. He held the rank of 2nd lieutenant and served in the Pacific, Saipan being one area mentioned. He received the Purple Heart, but neither my sister Julie nor I know the details about how he earned this. Other medals he was awarded were the Asia Theatre Medal, the Victory Medal and the American Service Medal.

After the war Stan resumed his studies but this time at the University of Minnesota, School of Forestry. He began working summers with the Forest Service and began smokejumping the summer of 1948.

Stan met Julie sometime during the fall of 1947. (I was only eleven years old so I was not aware of my sister's social life then.) I do remember that during the summer of '48, while she was at home in our small town of Pierz, Minnesota, she was receiving letters from him, from Missoula, faithfully. (I was a nosey kid!) I believe he broke or sprained an ankle jumping that year. That fall, on October 30, 1948, my sister Julie and Stan were married at St. Olaf's Church in Minneapolis.

Stan would have graduated from the University of Minnesota in Forestry in June of 1950. His dream was to build a career with the Forest Service in upstate New York. However, he loved western Montana too, and that area would have been his second choice of where to spend his life.

As it turned out, Julie and Stan's married life was brief; nine whole months. They lived in a small trailer midway between Minneapolis and St. Paul---where

Stan attended university classes. Stan was going to school on the GI Bill and they didn't have much money. Stan took jobs with the Post Office and other organizations during vacations (Christmas and spring break).

After classes were out in mid-June, Stan left Minnesota to go to Fort Eustis in Virginia for a six-week period of ROTC training. It was during this time, I believe, that he earned his commission in the Army as first lieutenant. My sister, who was living at our family home in Pierz while Stan was in the East, was able to spend a short time with him. It was a brief little honeymoon, the honeymoon they had never had, and they spent it in Atlantic City.

Stan returned to Minnesota at the end of July and, after a brief visit, joined with his good friend Joe Sylvia to go out to Montana to rejoin the smokejumpers for their belated refresher jump training. I remember vividly the morning of Friday, July 29th, when they were to leave us very early for the long drive to Missoula.

Our whole family along with Joe and Stan gathered in our big old-fashioned country kitchen for breakfast at about 5:30 AM. My mother made a huge breakfast of pancakes, bacon and eggs, homemade sausage, pan-fried potatoes. I remember my dad asking Stan worriedly if that smokejumping out on fires in the backcountry wasn't rather dangerous. Stan replied that no it wasn't---that he had survived World War II and that was certainly a lot more dangerous. I remember standing in the driveway watching Joe and Stan pack their things into the little Chevy my dad had given them to use. Those were final goodbyes, although at the time we were totally unaware of such a possibility. (I still have the Marine Corps sharpshooter pin that Joe gave me the day before they left. I had admired it and he gave it to me. I wore it in his honor on the day of the dedication of the Smokejumpers' Memorial in Missoula two years ago.)

I don't know what Stan's last week of life was like except that I remember my sister receiving phone calls letting her know that he had arrived safely and had begun the usual refresher training for jumping. I learned later that during that week Stan's mother had had a fearsome dream about him. The details of the dream I don't know, but it involved Stan's death. She was so frightened by the dream that she wrote a letter to him to tell him to be careful. He never got to read that letter.

The weekend of August 5th was extremely hot in Minnesota too, as it was in Montana---the difference being only the humidity. Early Saturday morning (the 6th) my sister-in-law came to our house (before Julie was up) to tell my mother that she had heard a news broadcast on the radio telling of a bad fire burning between Helena and Missoula and that my mother should say nothing of this to Julie. I did remember Mother saying something aside to my dad, but for some reason we were all under the impression that Stan and Joe would have to complete a solid week (five days) of training before being jumped into a fire. Thus this bad fire near Helena would certainly not involve them.

My dad always listened to a ten PM newscast before going to bed. That evening, August 6th, my sister came into the livingroom in time for the broadcast. The newscaster reported the bad Montana fire and the fact that a University of Minnesota student had died in the hospital that day. He then gave his name: Joseph B. Sylvia. I can never describe the reaction of us all in the livingroom that night. We all started to cry and my sister ran to the phone and placed a person-to-person call to Stan. The reply was that he couldn't be reached, that he was "on call." A terrible likelihood filled us with fear: if Joe Sylvia had been on that fire so might be Stan Reba.

Thus began the all night vigil of August 6-7. The Smokejumper Center had taken my sister's number and about 2 AM they called and confirmed Stan's actual presence in that fire crew but said only that there were still ten jumpers missing and that there were three survivors, the names of which they would not give. We all thought that there was a shred of hope. Maybe it was just that we hoped beyond hope that he was alive.

My mother, dad, sister and I walked over to our nearby parish church about dawn, August 7th, to pray. In those days they didn't lock churches, at least not in our little town of Pierz, Minnesota. I can remember thinking that Stan just must be alive. Of course he had been dead for well over twenty-four hours by then.

The final call came about 2 PM Sunday. My dad answered the phone and from my bedroom I remember hearing this terribly strange sound. I ran out into the kitchen to see my dad standing there by the phone, just sobbing bitterly. In my years of life I had never seen or heard my dad cry before! I realized, as we all did then, what the phone call had told us.

To conclude, some of my memories of Stan:

The first Christmas, the only Christmas, they were married, Stan gave me a little gold locket which he had picked out himself. Julie told me how he had wanted to select it himself with no help from her and that the suggestion of the locket as a gift was his idea, not hers. That beautiful locket was very precious to me and I would still have it but for the fact that I put it in Julie's coffin when she died ten years later.

I remember visiting them, Stan and Julie, at Easter time, during my break from school. Stan was very busy at school but took the time to take me to the Como Park Zoo in St. Paul. He also, during that visit, drove me a good distance, during an early spring snowstorm, to a Catholic church so that I could attend Good Friday services.

I remember later that spring, when I was very sick, Stan drove Julie to Pierz, a two-and-a-half hour drive, so they could see me. This he did in spite of having a heavy load of tests to prepare for that week.

Stan also taught me to eat the skin of a baked potato because "that was the most nutritious part."

Stan loved to listen to Tex Ritter and had an album of Tex Ritter with which he'd tease Julie by playing it over and over. She was not a Ritter fan, preferring classical and standard hits rather than country. But Stan loved to listen to my mother's records of string quartets, so he enjoyed some of the classical too.

Stan Reba, that burly, football-playing, smokejumping man, also loved poetry. One of his favorites, "Crossing the Bar" by Alfred, Lord Tennyson, was used on his prayer card when he was buried, at my sister's request.

I also remember that Stan wrote beautiful letters to my sister. I, of course, never read them, but I remember that she read parts of his letters to me, years later, when I was first considering marriage to someone.

As I write this I can't help but think of how much richer our lives would have been had Stan lived, not only my sister's life, but our entire family's life. When Stan died, we not only lost a wonderful son and brother, but we also lost a wonderful daughter and sister. After Stan's death, my sister was never the same; she never remarried and ten years later she took her own life. Tragic events affect so many and have such long lasting consequences. Writing this has brought into focus, once again, the impact of that very tragic Mann Gulch Fire, August 5, 1949.

Marvin L. Sherman
Letter from a friend, Tom Magee, Sr.

In regard to Marvin Sherman, Dick as I knew him. Dick worked for the U.S. Forest Service on the Lolo District from 1945 to 1949 if I recall correctly. Help was hard to get at the end of World War II. Young men and old alike did the job.

I met Dick through my two teenage sisters, as well as several other young men who were running interference. Dick was manning Mormon Peak Lookout about 7 miles from our ranch on Lolo Creek. I had a good saddle horse and the ranger gave me \$10 to ride the telephone line and trail up to that lookout. It was like a vacation to me. I would talk my folks into buying me a case of beer; I'd put it on my saddle and head for Mormon Peak. While drinking warm beer Dick and I would clear the trail and maintain telephone lines. As the empty beer cans accumulated we would dig holes and bury them where the rangers wouldn't find them.

From that lookout you could look right down into the town of Lolo and see the Saturday night dance hall, The Rockaway. Sometimes we wished we were there and sometimes we were thinking, "Hell, we are already in heaven; why do you want to go down there?" The Forest Service had two burros, Gene and Ginny, which Dick usually had at the lookout to pack water. One could pack 20 gallons and the other 30 gallons. When he didn't have the burros, Dick would pack a 5 gallon backpack and two 2 gallon water sacks one and a half miles from the head of Mormon Creek every two days.

My mother, Audrey, liked Dick very much. The huckleberries that year were real good, so we made a date to take my mom picking berries. There was a short route but it was too steep for my mom. After picking our berries we walked the remaining half mile to Dick's lookout. As the tower came into sight Mother said, "My God, does he live up there?" With the help of Dick and me we got her to climb the thirty-foot tower. After she got her second wind she said she wanted to cook Dick a good dinner. I had packed enough up there to feed ten people. Fun was had by all.

In 1946 I started to fly at the Johnson Flying Service, J-3 Cubs. Dick tried to talk me into smokejumping. I said, "Bull; if it's flying, I'm

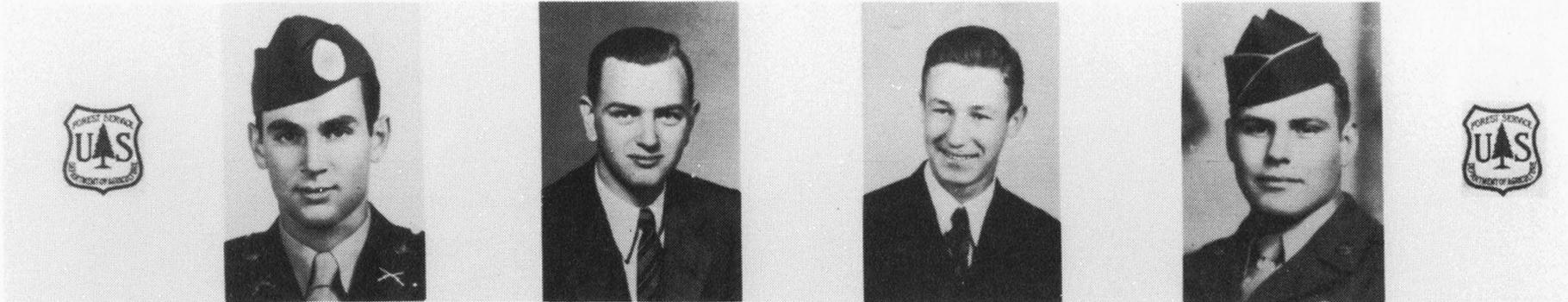
riding!"

In 1935 I got my first airplane ride at Hale Field, Missoula, Montana, at a penny a pound. Bob and Dick Johnson were the pilots.

Well sir, I say with deep regret that I moved to the Swan River Valley later in 1946, sawing logs with my dad, and I never saw Dick again, but we all loved him.

I joined the Air Force in 1950. I spent most of my tour on Guam. I missed your story in the Saturday Evening Post. As for Norman Maclean's book Young Men and Fire, I never heard of it. But I sure am eager to see a copy of it. . . .

I hope this might be of some value to you. You sure have my permission to use any or all of this. Sorry I can't be of more help.



David R. Navon

Robert J. Bennett

Leonard L. Piper

Silas R. Thompson, Jr.



Henry J. Thol, Jr.

Newton R. Thompson

William J. Hellman

Phillip R. McVey

Eldon E. Diettert



James O. Harrison

Marvin L. Sherman

Joseph B. Sylvia

Stanley J. Reba