



A PRACTICE JUMP INTO A "SET" FIRE IS GRADUATION EXERCISE FOR A FOREST SERVICE SMOKEJUMPER. REAL DROPS ARE NOT MADE THIS CLOSE TO A FIRE

SMOKEJUMPERS SUFFER ORDEAL BY FIRE

High in the Rockies, at Missoula, Mont., is the headquarters of Region One of the U.S. Forest Service, whose lonely lookouts stand guard over eight million rugged, roadless acres where forest fires annually threaten disaster. Ten years ago, seeking new ways to protect its timbered domain, the Forest Service began to experiment with parachuting men and equipment to help its ground forces fight fires. Today its tested squads of smokejumpers, most of them based in Montana, speed in

minutes to hem in forest fires that would take precious hours or days to reach overland. Scoffed at as show-offs a decade ago, the jumpers are respected now: by their efforts they regularly save many times the cost of their service. Fire fighting is seasonal work, and most of the young smokejumpers are college forestry students getting in licks of practical experience, at \$229 a month base pay, for their careers. Many made their first jumps as war-time paratroopers. They are 18 to 28 years old,

must have a season of Forest Service work behind them, take a month of instruction in fire fighting and make at least seven practice jumps before going out on their first real fire. On the afternoon of Aug. 5 a team of jumpers at the Missoula base was called to its first big test, and before the fire was out 13 men were dead, first to lose their lives in the distinguished history of the smokejumpers' service. On the following pages LIFE tells the heroic—but tragic—story of Montana's Mann Gulch fire.



PLANELOAD OF JUMPERS, photographed in Missoula before their final practice drop early in July, were among 250 young smokejumpers trained for 1949 forest

fire season. Four in this group (indicated on picture) died in Mann Gulch blaze. All but Thol, 19, were veterans. Navon, 28, had been with U.S. Army paratroops at Bastogne.