

DEDICATED TO THE PROMOTION OF TOWNS COUNTY

OPINIONS & COMMENTARY

USCG Counterdrug Ops

USCG Counterdrug OPS In Peru
Operation "Jester" excerpted from article by USCG historian, John Moseley, submitted by USCG brother, Ron Willis:



The Veterans' Corner
Scott Drummond
USCG Veteran

In 1980, cocaine was not yet on the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) radar screen. During the mid-1980s and 1990s, 60 percent of the world's coca crop was grown in Peru. Most of that coca was processed into a cocaine base and flown to Colombia to make cocaine for shipment to the USA and Europe.

The U.S. Government began policies to reduce the amount of cocaine flowing into America. The Reagan administration and Peru's government began collaborating on anti-drug programs within Peru. November 1985, under the Peruvian government, drug interdiction proved successful. Peru dispatched its army to remote areas to locate and destroy cocaine laboratories. In 18 months, these troops destroyed 36 laboratories and 150 airstrips, and seized 70 trafficking planes and 30 tons of coca paste. This initial success did not last.

In 1986, Shining Path guerrillas took control of the Hualagala Valley's coca fields.

The Peruvian government embroiled in civil war abandoned drug interdiction. Building, equipping and manning a strategic airfield in the Hualagala Valley became the DEA's responsibility. The counter-drug operation became part of a larger Department of State (DOS) operation.

Construction of the airfield began in 1998 with fixed-wing aircraft flying personnel, equipment, and supplies from Lima, Peru, to the base several times each week. DOS requested the immediate assistance of the Coast Guard to provide an air bridge between Lima and the airfield in Santa Lucia for two months using its HC-130 "Hercules" aircraft. Coast Guard Commandant Paul Yost agreed to the mission and Air Station Clearwater provided a C-130 and aircrew.

The assignment was far beyond the Service's normal mission. At operations level, this mission required a series of daily flights from Lima and other locations to the remote airbase in the Andes under threat from Shining Path forces. The initial Coast Guard operations brief, Commander Ed Park responded "You've got to be fooling me!" From this astonished statement, the name operation's name "Jester" was born.

"Improve and adapt" has ALWAYS been required by us Coasties. USCG crew members needed protection from small arms fire plus special training required by air crews for avoidance of surface to air missiles. Flak jackets became DE-rigured and improvised avoidance by a crew member who fired marine grade distress signals out the rear ramp to "redirect" SAMs when he saw a flash of a SAM firing. Kevlar bullet proof blankets placed on the decks of USCG aircraft, plus blacked out USCG markings. Civilian clothing for USCG members was required as well as personal sidearms when off base.

The Coast Guard's involvement in Operation Jester concluded on October 20, 1989. The Coast Guard team's swift action and dedication to the mission demonstrates why the Coast Guard is frequently called upon for rapid response. Rooted in its search and rescue mentality, Coast Guard personnel adapt to the impossible and find a solution.

As it was way back in my day, "GET 'ER DONE" and "CAN YOU HANDLE IT!?" were spoken almost every day, no matter what! -Semper Paratus

Well Water

Most people in Georgia have well water in their homes. Here in the mountains, many people enjoy fresh mountain water as their primary drinking source. Therefore, it's very important that people be aware of potential issues with well water and things that they can do to mitigate issues. Let's talk about some well issues and things you can do to prevent those issues from occurring.

The US Geological Survey keeps track of water aquifer levels. The nearest test site for us is in White County. Because of the high amounts of rainfall that we receive each year, our aquifers drying out is not a concern like it is in the Western US.

The aquifer we access is the Blue Ridge aquifer. It's a crystalline rock aquifer, which means that the gallons per minutes that you get from a well here is going to most likely be in the 5-10 range. Wells can be pretty variable in yield in North Georgia because of the variations in the fractures in the ground. Basically, for well drilling here, you put the well in and hope that you cross some of the fractures where water is present.

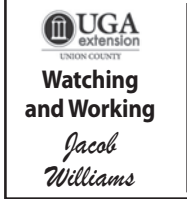
You want to make sure that your well is located at least 50 feet from the septic tank and 75 feet from the septic system's drainage lines. You also want to make sure that your well cap is at least 8 inches above the ground. This is going to keep surface water from getting inside of your well. Surface water can carry bacteria and debris that you want to keep out. It's also a good idea to have a well cover to protect the well cap. A well cover makes your well more visible so that it's less likely to be backed into by a vehicle or run over by the lawn mower.

Always be on the lookout for changes in the water. If you see a difference in color, a new odor, new taste, or particles in your water that's a clue that your well has become compromised. There's a lot of water tests that the Extension Office can assist you with to find out what is going with your water. By knowing the symptoms, when the issue started, where the septic system is, what kind of construction might have gone on nearby, among other factors can help narrow down the range of issues that we are dealing with.

Shock chlorination is a common treatment that is effective if bacteria are present. Shock chlorination won't be effective if the source of the contamination is not removed. Sources of contamination could include a septic system, absence of well cap, or a cracked well casing. You'll want to use three pints of ordinary bleach for 100 gallons of water in the well.

Annual testing of the water in your well will start to build data on what your well normally is like. If you do run into problems with the well then you'll have data to look back at to see what's changed. It's best to test in the spring, because that is generally when our aquifers are recharging.

If you would like to test your well water contact your local Extension Office. We can assist you by providing the resources to test.



Watching and Working
Jacob Williams



Calvin and Alvin

My earliest memories of Calvin are those of adulation. He was a real mountain man. He was short in stature, bow-legged and potbellied. He was fearful of no man and loved deer hunting and coon hunting.



Around The Farm
Mickey Cummings

He loved to laugh and didn't mind spinning a yarn to get a laugh out of you. I admired the man because he knew about the woods and didn't mind taking a young boy to the woods.

I must have been close to 9 years old the first time I was allowed to go to Deer Camp with Calvin. I was not allowed to carry a gun, but I was allowed to accompany the other men. Calvin took me with him, and I was sitting on top of the world.

I can still remember sitting on top of White Oak Mountain watching the deer move about on those clear mountain mornings. But, the most memorable part of deer camp that year was Calvin's brother Alvin.

Like his brother, Alvin loved to tell yarns about the woods. Just before this particular hunt, Alvin had purchased a brand-new Ruger .44 magnum. It was a good gun, however, Alvin had very poor vision, and I never remember him shooting a deer.

He could tell you how to shoot and he could tell you about finding the biggest bucks. Most people thought he was a great hunter because of his tales. But I cannot remember him ever taking a deer himself. All the venison he consumed was given to him by his older brother Calvin.

The first day of Deer Camp ended with a good hearty meal around a campfire. I sat pretty close to the fire trying to brace myself against the chill of that October night and ate some beef stew and cornbread. Alvin came back into camp and was immediately asked about his day. He told us that one 8-point buck had walked by his stand. He shot at the deer, but the wind had pushed the bullet off his mark. Actually, we had heard the report of Alvin's bolt action rifle four times.

The next day was similar and produced similar results. That same 8-point buck had walked by his stand again. This time the 8-pointer snorted after the man shot at and missed his quarry. However, his excuse was that the sun was in his eyes causing him to miss the deer. Four days came and went, and Alvin always had an excuse as to why he missed the same deer.

Alvin came walking into camp the last day of the hunt and was asked if he'd seen the 8-pointer. He told us the deer had shown up just after 9 a.m. He had a clear shot and slowly raised his rifle. "That buck looked right at me, and I noticed the sun glinting off of his antlers."

"Well, I lowered that gun and motioned for that old buck to come to me. When he walked up to me, he lowered his head and allowed me to pet his muzzle. I scratched around on his head for a while. I told him that I wasn't going to harm him. But he better stay away from that bunch in the camp, because one them sap suckers down there would kill him."

Men in that camp laughed so hard they fell off the stumps on which they were a sitting. I sat there amazed that this man had such a big heart. I actually thought he had let that deer go. I learned better on the way home. His brother Calvin told this wet-behind-the-ears little boy about his brother Alvin. His little brother was the biggest man I ever knew. He was well over 6 feet tall and weighed more than 300 pounds. I believe he was the slowest moving human being that ever lived. But he loved to laugh and was always pulling practical jokes on people.

One spring a bunch of us were fishing in a lake at the foot of Lookout Mountain. Alvin came walking up with his arms wrapped around his lizard bucket. Back in those days many of us fished with Spring Lizards (a type of salamander).

The bucket had a small hole in the top in which you could stick your finger to pull back the lid, allowing you to reach in and catch a lizard with which to bait your hook. The way in which Alvin walked we all could tell he wasn't very happy.

When he finally got to the place where we were fishing, Calvin asked, "What you looking so angry about, little brother?" The bigger, yet younger brother grumbled, "That bunch at that Lake Howard Store cheated me a giving me some of the smallest spring lizards I've ever seen. Here, take a look."

Calvin took the bucket and told his younger brother that the pierces back at the store were having a hard time with their finances.

He further explained that they may have just decreased their quality to increase their profits. After his explanation, he stuck his finger into the hole of the bucket and lifted the lid without looking inside. He was still trying to ease the anger of his younger brother. After lifting, he stuck his nose toward the opening, and all at once a rather large black snake rocketed out of the bait bucket right into the face of my friend.

I have never witnessed such a commotion since that day. Calvin let out a whoop while throwing the bucket straight up into the air. All of us standing around scattered trying to avoid the snake. Calvin tried to run. His legs were churning, but he wasn't moving. He was running in place. Eventually, the bucket fell, landing on his head.

Alvin took advantage of the moment and slowly began to run. After shaking the bucket off his head, his bow-legged brother gave chase. We watched the pair running around the lake and listened to the laughter of the bigger man as his smaller brother chased him toward the barn of Clem Byrd.

I will never forget the brothers Calvin and Alvin.

Smokey Bear Awards

I recently wrote about one of our own, wildfire education and prevention team member Mark Wiles, receiving the prestigious Silver Smokey national award for 2022 (only one).



RC&D
Frank Riley
Executive Director

The following is a press release from the National Association of State Foresters:

"In the world of wildfire prevention, there is no greater honor than to receive a Smokey Bear Award. From the 1950s to today, the Smokey Bear Awards program has been managed by the National Association of State Foresters (NASF), the Ad Council, and the USDA Forest Service. "The Smokey Bear Award winners are honored for the dedication, innovation, and energy they bring to wildfire prevention," said USDA Forest Service Chief Randy Moore. "For many years, we have bestowed these awards on only the most deserving people, who show up with the passion and desire to make a difference year after year. We thank all of the honorees for their dedication and work that allowed them to receive the most sought-after award for those in the wildfire profession. The winners are to be congratulated for their dedication, hard work, and passion for creating programs to help citizens who live in the wildland urban interface protect their homes and property from wildfire. To be fair, none of the winners since the 1950's could have done what they have accomplished alone, because it takes a strong team to make wildfire education and a successful prevention program meaningful for the people who need it most, the citizens who live and work in the communities that these wildfire professionals are committed to protect. The award winners are leaders who know how to organize a team to accomplish their goals and a strong, dedicated team is the key to any successful, sustainable program."

Since the mid-1960s, Georgia has produced 15 Smokey Bear award winners, and since 2014, there have been five Smokey Bear winners from North Georgia, and all are key members of our Georgia Fire Adapted Communities and Firewise USA group. That says a lot for how serious we are about helping the citizens do things to protect their property when a wildfire event approaches like in 2016.

In case you haven't noticed, it hasn't rained a significant amount in several weeks, and with the pretty leaf fall the fire danger is very high. Even if we had a shower, the winds, low humidity, and the dry fuel (leaves) all create a very dangerous perfect storm just looking for a match or spark to start the raging inferno around your community.

As noted above, since 2014, our wildfire team in North Georgia has received five Smokey Bear awards: 2014, Mike Davis, Fire Management Officer, Chattahoochee/Oconee National Forest - Silver Smokey Bear Award for regional wildfire prevention & education work; 2017, Jeff Schardt & the Conasauga Ranger District, the Cohutta Wilderness, Chattahoochee/Oconee National forest - Bronze Smokey Bear Award for wildfire prevention and education work in Georgia; 2020, Thomas Black (aka: Smokey Bear), Firefighter Chattahoochee/Oconee National Forest, Chattooga Ranger District - Bronze Smokey Bear Award for wildfire prevention & education work in Georgia; 2021, Frank Riley, Executive Director Chestatee Chattahoochee RC&D Council & Appalachian RC&D FAC Coalition - Silver Smokey Bear Award for regional wildfire prevention & education work; 2022, Mark Wiles, Wildfire Prevention Specialist, Georgia Forestry Commission - Silver Smokey Bear Award for regional wildfire prevention & education work.

These professionals are credits to their wildfire profession and are to be applauded for their efforts to help citizens help themselves and save their property and even lives. It's not their homes that are in danger, but yours, so join with them and be safe and be Firewise.

Check out the Smokey Bear awards with a visit to Smokey-Bear.com. These awards say a lot about the dedication by this team to educate the public about wildfire risk and public safety here in the Southeast United States and beyond. And don't forget, as ole Smokey always says, "Only YOU can prevent wildfires!"

For more information on Firewise, Fire Adapted communities, Ready Set Go or other programs available, contact Chestatee/Chattahoochee RC&D Council at info.ccrd@gmail.com.

Guest Columns

From time to time, people in the community have a grand slant on an issue that would make a great guest editorial. Those who feel they have an issue of great importance should call our editor and talk with him about the idea. Others have a strong opinion after reading one of the many columns that appear throughout the paper. If so, please write.

Please remember that publication of submitted editorials is not guaranteed.

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P.O. Box 365, Hiawassee, GA 30546
Our email address: tcherald@windstream.net

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Letters should address issues of general interest, such as politics, the community, environment, school issues, etc. Letters opposing the views of previous comments are welcomed; however, letters cannot be directed at, nor name or ridicule previous writers. Letters that recognize good deeds of others will be considered for publication.*

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