

JOHN B. (JACK) SMITH  
USFS RETIREES REUNION 2000  
LIVING HISTORY PROJECT  
AUGUST 18, 2002  
**ADDENDUM: Gov. Snell's Plane Crash**

***I am John B. (Jack) Smith, a US Forest Service Retiree, having retired in Denver, Colorado in 1970. The subject of this tape is "Reunion 2000 – Oral History Project". I made a tape for Larry Cron, the Project Chairman, following the Missoula reunion in 2000. However, there are two incidents which happened on the Fremont National Forest, which I failed to include, but which are important enough that they should be included.***

The first episode was the Japanese Balloon bombing that occurred on May 5<sup>th</sup>, 1945 in Bly, Oregon, which I have written about elsewhere. The second episode, which I will now discuss, was the fatal plane crash that killed Oregon Governor Earl W. Snell and others. This crash occurred on October 28, 1947, some 25 miles southwest of Lakeview, Oregon on the Drew's Valley District. I was District Ranger on the Drew's Valley District and headed up a search party. Merle S. Lowden was Forest Supervisor.

Governor Earl Snell, Secretary of State Robert S. Farrell Jr., President of the Senate Marshall E. Cornett, and their pilot, Cliff Hogue, left Klamath Falls late in the evening of Tuesday, October 27<sup>th</sup>. They were headed for Warner Valley and the Kittredge Ranch where they planned to land on a dry lake bed. The Kittredges were hosting a goose hunt for these Oregon officials. The airplane left Klamath Falls about 10 PM (or later) and did not arrive at the Kittredge Ranch. The Kittredge family thought the plane had not left Klamath Falls, so the plane was not reported missing until Wednesday morning. There had been a small weather front over Lakeview during the night. The airplane was a Beechcraft Bonanza. The pilot probably planned to follow the highway from Klamath Falls to Lakeview, a distance of about 100 miles, and then fly over the Warner Mountain Range another 30 or 40 miles to the Kittredge Ranch, which was located in South Warner. The airstrip at Kittredge Ranch would be lighted by automobile headlights so the pilot could see enough to land. Lakeview, Oregon is a mile high in elevation and the route is all mountainous country.

Although the weather was bad, a small search plane flown by Bob Adams got a fleeting glimpse of the crashed airplane Wednesday afternoon. The Forest Service, however, was not informed that the Governor's plane was missing until 2 p.m. on Wednesday. When I got word that the crashed plane had been sighted on the Drew's Valley Ranger District, southwest of Dog

Lake, I ordered a 50-man fire cache, except for tools, and proceeded to set up a base camp some ¾-mile southwest of Dog Lake on the Yokum Valley Road. This was the nearest road to the area where the crash had been sighted. A hard-surfaced road extended to Dog Lake, some 20 miles southwest of Lakeview. The ¾-mile stretch on the Yokum Valley Road had a light gravel surface. After a few trips with 4-wheel drive vehicles, the road became almost impassible for even 4-wheel drive vehicles. We did have telephone and radio communication at the base camp.

We had a cook, so food and hot coffee were readily available. We provided for sanitation and could handle the 50 or 60 men who showed up to help with the search. Mostly they were Forest Services employees and local citizens. However, there were a couple of state police officers, many members of the press, and others.

Although some searching was done late Wednesday, searchers were hampered by cold rain, pitch darkness, and the rugged terrain. These searches were somewhat disorganized and ineffective.

The plane crash was at about the 6,000-ft level, and was heavily timbered with mature ponderosa pine timber. It is moderately rough country with peaks, rock escarpments, and deep ravines.

At daylight Thursday morning, we were well organized and ready to go. There were about 50 or 60 searchers in the group. I briefed the group on what we would do. We lined up about 50 feet apart in a generally north-south direction. We followed a compass course westerly and told people to stay close enough together to have contact with the person on each side of them. The two state police officers were at the east end of the search line. We did not want people to get lost and wander around in the wet, cold weather. As a signal, one of the state police officers was to fire his pistol three times when the plane was found.

After travelling ½ to ¾ mile cross-country, we walked into the crashed airplane. The plane had hit several tall ponderosa pine trees, crashed in a small opening, and slid under the pine trees. One of the passengers was thrown out a door that came open, and the other three were in the fuselage which was badly damaged. There were no survivors; they were killed on impact. The plane had not burned upon crashing. The operation went well and the search was successful. There was excellent cooperation among lots of people. Many news people were there, but then the real work started as we had to carry the bodies back to base camp where they

could be loaded on 4-wheel drive vehicles and moved to Lakeview. We had carried litters and sheets with us, so we got started moving the bodies immediately.

As is often the case, the carrying was done by a limited number of people. It was a real struggle moving the bodies across the rugged terrain to camp, but we got the job done. We cleaned up the area and closed up the campsite. We also said thanks to many people, both Forest Service employees and others who helped.

Governor Snell, Marshall Cornett, and Bob Farrell were very popular politicians. Earl Snell has been eulogized as one of Oregon's top Governors with great facility to attract good people around him and to delegate and supervise them in excellent fashion. Marshall Cornett and Bob Farrell were also very popular politicians in leadership positions in Oregon. Each of them was a potential Oregon Governor in the future, if they had lived.

N. B.—WRITE PLAINLY WITH UNFADING INK—THIS IS A PERMANENT RECORD. Every item of information should be carefully supplied. AGE should be stated EXACTLY. PHYSICIANS should state CAUSE OF DEATH in plain terms, so that it may be properly classified. Exact statement of OCCUPATION is very important.

Oregon State Board of Health  
Division of Vital Statistics

10582 84-7443-3  
Standard Certificate of Death  
STATE OF OREGON

State File No. 7137  
Local Registrar's No. 44-47

1. PLACE OF DEATH

(a) County Lake      NOV 6 1947

(b) City or town Bly (Rural)  
(If outside city or town limits write RURAL)

(c) Name of hospital or institution  
3 mi. S. of Log Lake, Lake Co. Oregon  
(If not in hospital or institution write street number or location)

(d) Length of stay In hospital or institution \_\_\_\_\_  
(Specify whether In this community (years, months or days) In state Life

2. USUAL RESIDENCE OF DECEASED:

(a) State Oregon      (b) County Marion

(c) City or town Salem  
(If outside city or town limits write RURAL)

(d) Street No. \_\_\_\_\_  
(If rural give location)

(e) If foreign born, how long in U.S.A? \_\_\_\_\_ years  
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3. (a) FULL NAME EARL W. SNELL

3. (b) If veteran, name war World War #1      3. (c) Social Security No. \_\_\_\_\_

4. Sex Male      race White      5. Color or \_\_\_\_\_      6. (a) Single, ~~widowed~~, divorced, Married

8. (b) Name of husband or wife Edith      8. (c) Age of husband or wife if alive 46 years

7. Birth date of deceased July 11 1895  
(Month) (Day) (Year)

8. Age:      Years      Months      Days      If less than one day

52      3      17      hr      min

9. Birthplace Olex Oregon  
(City, town, or county) (State or foreign country)

10. Usual occupation Governor

11. Industry or business State of Oregon

12. Name William H. Snell

13. Birthplace California  
(City, town, or county) (State or foreign country)

14. Maiden name Mattie May Harding

15. Birthplace Iowa  
(City, town, or county) (State or foreign country)

16. (a) Informant's own signature A. J. Rose

(b) Address Portland, Oregon

17. (a) Removal      (b) Date thereof 10/30/47  
(Burial, cremation, or removal) (Month) (Day) (Year)

(c) Place, burial or cremation Salem, Oregon

18. (a) Signature of funeral director A. J. Rose - Son

(b) Address 537 S. Elder

19. (a) 10-30-47      (b) Joyce H. Robertson  
(State and local registrar) (Registrar's signature)

MEDICAL CERTIFICATION

20. Date of death: Month October day 28  
year 1947 hour approx 10 minute 05 P.M.

21. I hereby certify that I took charge of the remains  
attended the deceased from \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_  
is \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_, that I ~~test saw~~ also  
on \_\_\_\_\_, 19\_\_\_\_, and that death occurred on the date  
and hour stated above.

Immediate cause of death: Accidental trauma by crushing      Duration 10/28/47

Due to Occupant of airplane involved in crash.

Due to \_\_\_\_\_

Other conditions Include pregnancy within 3 months of death

Major findings: Of operations

Of autopsy \_\_\_\_\_

22. If death was due to external causes, fill in the following:

(a) Accident, suicide, or homicide (specify) accident

(b) Date of occurrence October 28, 1947

(c) Where did injury occur? 3 mi. S. of Log Lake, Oregon  
(City or town) (County) (State)

(d) Did injury occur in or about home, on farm, in industrial place, in public place? Public Domain  
(Specify type of place)

What work? No      (e) Means of injury plane

23. Signature Lang H. Adcox      (M. D. registrar)  
Address Flairwood Falls, Ore.      Date signed 10/30/47  
J. H. Chesley, Coroner Lake County