
Here Come the Smokejumpers

Article

RED BANK, New Jersey (Achieve3000, September 9, 2019). A fire suddenly breaks out in a remote region of California where seasonal forest fires frequently occur. It's only a small blaze at the moment. But give it time and wind, and it'll start consuming acre upon acre of timber and brush. Then it'll be a wildfire of monstrous proportions that's headed for a populated area. For now, though, no one lives anywhere near it to notice the escalating nightmare. And even if someone were to alert the fire department, how would firefighters get at it when there are no roads and the terrain is so inaccessible?

But look...up in the sky! A team of parachutists is heading straight for the blaze, ready to bring it to its knees. Yes, the smokejumpers have arrived!

Pretty dramatic, huh?

Well, drama and high stakes go with the territory for the 320 or so smokejumpers who work for the U.S. Forest Service at seven bases in Idaho, California, Montana, Washington, and Oregon. The same goes for the two crews the Bureau of Land Management deploys from its bases in Idaho and Alaska. Every year, from late spring to early fall, these valiant skydiving firefighters are ready at a moment's notice to suit up, 'chute up, take off, and airdrop into hard-to-get-to wildlands throughout the U.S. They serve as the initial attack force against forest fires.

Hands down, the most dangerous thing a smokejumper has to do during a mission is to land safely. Small wonder, given treetop landings, tree branch punctures, missed targets, and hard impacts on rocky ground. That's why smokejumpers wear padded jumpsuits made of Kevlar, the same material used in bulletproof vests, and helmets with strong wire-mesh face masks. When smokejumpers land on tall trees, they pull a "let-down rope" out of their right-leg pocket to safely climb down. The personal gear bags they carry with them will also come in handy during the mission: They contain leather gloves, a hard hat, flares, a knife, a compass, and a special aluminum sack that serves as an emergency fire shelter.

Once they're on solid ground, smokejumpers shed their jump gear and link up with each other. Then they collect their firefighting equipment and other supplies, which have been airdropped in containers. The crew is now self-sufficient for approximately 48 hours and ready to get down to business. On occasion, smokejumpers assist with much larger fires, too. If so, they're prepared to spend weeks in the thick of it.

Okay, time to put out those flames once and for all. Typically, smokejumpers employ a multipronged strategy to tame the stubborn beast. First, they "build a line" at the fire's point of origin, using a pathway or stream, if available, or digging and dredging one. The line prevents the fire from circling back. Next, they remove any potential fuel sources along the perimeter of the fire that can feed it, like brush and trees. They do so by hacking them down, digging them up, or starting small backfires of their own to burn them away. On occasion, smokejumpers also use chainsaws to chop down sizable trees and portable pumps if a water source is handy.

Not exactly what you'd call a day at the beach.

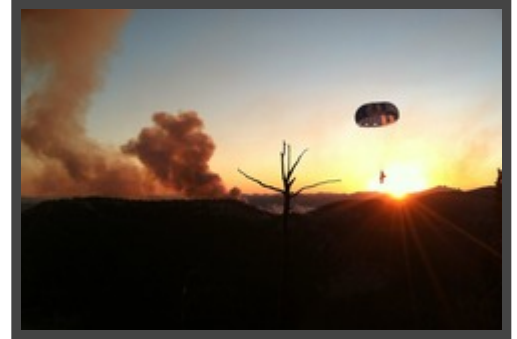


Photo credit: U.S. Forest Service
A smokejumper parachutes toward a wildfire.

So what does it take to be a smokejumper? Previous wildland firefighting experience is a prerequisite. So are physical stamina, emotional fortitude, and mental alertness. In order to qualify, smokejumper applicants in Alaska, for example, must be able to run 1.5 miles (2.4 kilometers) in under 10 minutes. They must also carry a 110-pound (49.9-kilogram) pack for 3 miles (4.8 kilometers) in under 55 minutes. Once they get the gig, they undergo rigorous training. This includes aircraft exiting procedures, parachute maneuvering and landing rolls, timber let-down procedures, parachute and cargo retrieval, and tree climbing.

So if smokejumpers sound more like superheroes than humans—after all, they fly, land, and save the day—you're not far off the mark. The difference is, these brave men and women are *real-life* first responders who make our world a safer place.

Video credit: VOA

Dictionary

prerequisite (*noun*) something that you officially must have or do before you can have or do something else

retrieval (*noun*) the act or process of getting and bringing back something: the act or process of retrieving something

rigorous (*adjective*) very strict and demanding

Activity

PART 1

Question 1

What is this Article mainly about?

- Ⓐ Smokejumpers must be ready at a moment's notice to parachute into hard-to-get-to wooded areas throughout the United States and act as an initial force to battle against forest fires.
- Ⓑ Smokejumpers wear padded suits made of Kevlar, the same material used in bulletproof vests, in order to avoid being punctured by tree branches when they skydive into areas plagued by fire.
- Ⓒ A smokejumper must carry firefighting equipment and enough supplies to last for 48 hours, although on occasion he or she must be prepared to stay on the ground for weeks.
- Ⓓ A smokejumper's first order of business is to "build a line" at the fire's point of origin by using an existing pathway or stream if available, or by digging a line so that the fire can't circle back.

Question 2

What is a cause and effect relationship that takes place in the Article?

- Ⓐ Since a smokejumper should be able to carry out his or her mission at any time and under any conditions, the smokejumper wears a special suit that serves as a barrier against stormy weather.
- Ⓑ Since a smokejumper's first challenge when landing in a fire zone is to survive the fire itself, the smokejumper wears a special suit that can serve as an emergency fire shelter.
- Ⓒ Since a smokejumper must carry a heavy gear bag containing leather gloves, a hard hat, flares, and other vital equipment, the smokejumper is only allowed to remain in a fire zone for a period of 48 hours.
- Ⓓ Since a smokejumper's landing may be very dangerous, the smokejumper will don a Kevlar jumpsuit and a helmet with a wire-mesh face mask before parachuting into a fire zone.

Question 3

Which is the closest **synonym** for the word *rigorous*?

- Ⓐ accommodating
- Ⓑ uncompromising
- Ⓒ beneficial
- Ⓓ inspirational

Question 4

Which information is **not** in the Article?

- Ⓐ How smokejumpers are able to access the firefighting equipment that they require without actually having to carry it themselves
- Ⓑ What important actions smokejumpers initially take in order to prevent a forest fire from circling back upon itself
- Ⓒ What physical and mental qualifications a firefighter must possess before being allowed to join a team of smokejumpers
- Ⓓ How many injuries and deaths occur annually among the teams of smokejumpers spread out across the western United States

Question 5

The Article states:

Okay, time to put out those flames once and for all. Typically, smokejumpers employ a multipronged strategy to tame the stubborn beast. First, they "build a line" at the fire's point of origin, using a pathway or stream, if available, or digging and dredging one. The line prevents the fire from circling back. Next, they remove any potential fuel sources along the perimeter of the fire that can feed it, like brush and trees. They do so by hacking them down, digging them up, or starting small backfires of their own to burn them away. On occasion, smokejumpers also use chainsaws to chop down sizable trees and portable pumps if a water source is handy.

Why did the author include this passage?

- Ⓐ To point out the widely varied sources of fuel that can feed an initially small fire and cause it to become a major fire
- Ⓑ To describe the series of steps taken by smokejumpers after they parachute to the ground to fight a forest fire
- Ⓒ To suggest that it can be extremely dangerous to fight an existing blaze by lighting a backfire to burn away brush and trees
- Ⓓ To explain the extensive training that all smokejumpers must undergo before being allowed to take part in actual firefighting missions

Question 6

What is one inference the reader can make from the Article?

- Ⓐ Smokejumpers are only able to work in states where the U.S. Forest Service or the Bureau of Land Management have set up bases.
- Ⓑ Regular firefighters often find it impossible to access the areas where smokejumpers typically perform their firefighting operations.
- Ⓒ Smokejumpers often team up with regular woodland firefighters and drive to the fires rather than parachute into the fire zone.
- Ⓓ A candidate who applies to become a smokejumper must have worked at a regular city or county fire department first.

Question 7

Look at this passage from the Article:

The same goes for the two crews the Bureau of Land Management *deploys* from its bases in Idaho and Alaska. Every year, from late spring to early fall, these valiant skydiving firefighters are ready at a moment's notice to suit up, 'chute up, take off, and airdrop into hard-to-get-to wildlands throughout the U.S. They serve as the initial attack force against forest fires.

In this passage, the word *deploys* means _____.

- Ⓐ to have someone begin a new job, position, or government office
- Ⓑ to organize and send out people for a particular purpose
- Ⓒ to teach someone the skills that are needed to do something
- Ⓓ to cause someone or something to be widely known

Question 8

Which passage from the Article best supports the idea that smokejumpers risk personal injury when performing their normal operations?

- Ⓐ So what does it take to be a smokejumper? Previous wildland firefighting experience is a prerequisite. So are physical stamina, emotional fortitude, and mental alertness. In order to qualify, smokejumper applicants in Alaska, for example, must be able to run 1.5 miles (2.4 kilometers) in under 10 minutes. They must also carry a 110-pound (49.9-kilogram) pack for 3 miles (4.8 kilometers) in under 55 minutes.
- Ⓑ A fire suddenly breaks out in a remote region of California where seasonal forest fires frequently occur. It's only a small blaze at the moment. But give it time and wind, and it'll start consuming acre upon acre of timber and brush. Then it'll be a wildfire of monstrous proportions that's headed for a populated area. For now, though, no one lives anywhere near it to notice the escalating nightmare. And even if someone were to alert the fire department, how would firefighters get at it when there are no roads and the terrain is so inaccessible?
- Ⓒ Hands down, the most dangerous thing a smokejumper has to do during a mission is to land safely. Small wonder, given treetop landings, tree branch punctures, missed targets, and hard impacts on rocky ground. That's why smokejumpers wear padded jumpsuits made of Kevlar, the same material used in bulletproof vests, and helmets with strong wire-mesh face masks. When smokejumpers land on tall trees, they pull a "let-down rope" out of their right-leg pocket to safely climb down.
- Ⓓ Once they're on solid ground, smokejumpers shed their jump gear and link up with each other. Then they collect their firefighting equipment and other supplies, which have been airdropped in containers. The crew is now self-sufficient for approximately 48 hours and ready to get down to business.