It is a great privilege to participate in this dedication.

I will try to tell you what kind of young men became smokejumpers. When they filled out the application and accepted the job offer they demonstrated that they were young men who had decided to test their personal courage – face fear – fulfill a need to step up from the rest of the crowd.

When you are a boy growing up you go through a series of steps to overcome fear. In the beginning you are afraid of everything. One by one they overcome these anxieties until they decide to put the question of courage aside forever. And there is no better way than jumping out of an airplane to convince yourself and show the world that you are not afraid.

And after you report and stand up on the tower and look down at at least a broken leg, you grit your teeth and jump just like all your buddies.

And when you’re kneeling in the doorway of the plane looking down at little buildings and cattle and trees, you think “my God, am I really going to do this?” Another fear comes forth and it dominates your being – and that is the fear of facing your buddies if you don’t jump again.

So when the spotter hits your leg you jump, and it takes forever to fall the 20 feet or so to the end of your static line.

I can’t describe to you the glorious feeling that goes with seeing that beautiful white canopy overhead and the exhilaration of knowing you have done it. When you reach the ground the camaraderie with those who also jumped (in other words, conquered fear today) is overwhelming.

For myself I feel the greatest benefit of the smokejumping program was the belief in a day’s work for a day’s pay. This program teaches men that if you are given a job, do it and don’t complain. If you don’t want it there are hundreds of others who do. There is no union to protect you. You stand on your own merits and he who works hard succeeds in all things.

Again I want to say I’m sorry I couldn’t tell you more about the men we honor today. But I will say this: They were outstanding young men, selected from among the best, with proven courage, determined to succeed and dedicated to doing the job assigned.

They gave their life trying, and this tribute is long overdue.