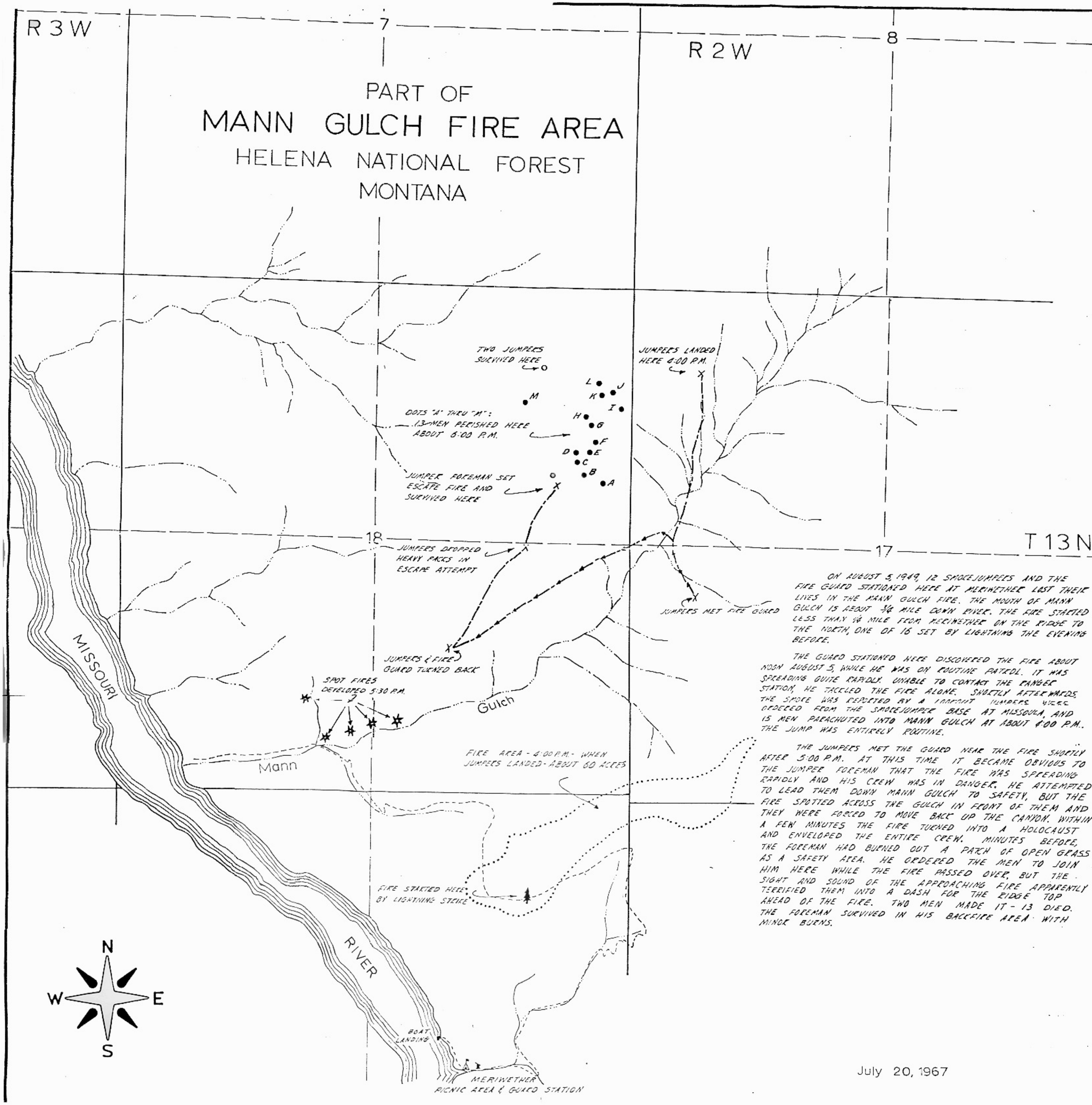

ON AUGUST 5, 1949, 12 SMOKEJUMPERS AND THE FIRE GUARD STATIONED HERE AT MERIWETHER LOST THEIR LIVES IN THE MANN GULCH FIRE. THE MOUTH OF MANN GULCH IS ABOUT 3/4 MILE DOWN RIVER. THE FIRE STARTED LESS THAN 1/4 MILE FROM MERIWETHER ON THE RIDGE TO THE NORTH, ONE OF 16 SET BY LIGHTNING THE EVENING BEFORE.

THE GUARD STATIONED HERE DISCOVERED THE FIRE ABOUT NOON AUGUST 5, WHILE HE WAS ON ROUTINE PATROL. IT WAS SPREADING QUITE RAPIDLY. UNABLE TO CONTACT THE RANGER STATION, HE TACKLED THE FIRE ALONE. SHORTLY AFTERWARDS THE SMOKE WAS REPORTED BY A LOOKOUT. JUMPERS WERE ORDERED FROM THE SMOKEJUMPER BASE AT MISSOULA, AND 15 MEN PARACHUTED INTO MANN GULCH AT ABOUT 4:00 P.M.. THE JUMP WAS ENTIRELY ROUTINE.

THE JUMPERS MET THE GUARD NEAR THE FIRE SHORTLY AFTER 5:00 P.M. AT THIS TIME IT BECAME OBVIOUS TO THE JUMPER FOREMAN THAT THE FIRE WAS SPREADING RAPIDLY AND HIS CREW WAS IN DANGER. HE ATTEMPTED TO LEAD THEM DOWN MANN GULCH TO SAFETY, BUT THE FIRE SPOTTED ACROSS THE GULCH IN FRONT OF THEM AND THEY WERE FORCED TO MOVE BACK UP THE CANYON. WITHIN A FEW MINUTES THE FIRE TURNED INTO A HOLOCAUST AND ENVELOPED THE ENTIRE CREW. MINUTES BEFORE, THE FOREMAN HAD BURNED OUT A PATCH OF OPEN GRASS AS A SAFETY AREA. HE ORDERED THE MEN TO JOIN HIM HERE WHILE THE FIRE PASSED OVER, BUT THE SIGHT AND SOUND OF THE APPROACHING FIRE APPARENTLY TERRIFIED THEM INTO A DASH FOR THE RIDGE TOP AHEAD OF THE FIRE. TWO MEN MADE IT - 13 DIED. THE FOREMAN SURVIVED IN HIS BACKFIRE AREA WITH MINOR BURNS.

July 20, 1967