Remembering Bill Manlove
by Jack Thomas

Once upon a time many were involved in breathing life into the paper tiger that became the Henry’s Fork Foundation, but the real driving force, the brains of the outfit, as we all know, was Bill Manlove. Bright blue eyes, bushy eyebrows, white-haired mop, resonant self-assured voice with an East Coast accent, and a six foot two inch bulky frame made him look and sound like what he was: a polished WWII/ West Point product. Born in 1923, he was a graduate of the Academy’s accelerated wartime class of 1944, from which he entered what was then the Army Air Corps.

In those flying years, after receiving his gold bars, he got a master’s degree in electrical engineering from the University of Illinois and became a member of the initial faculty at the newly-formed Air Force Academy near Colorado Springs.

He rose to the permanent rank of Colonel, USAF, before he was passed over as a Brigadier General—for reasons of health according to his wife, Rita. Rita said that his failure to reach that goal was the biggest disappointment in his life.

When Bill became an Island Park property owner, he was retired from the Air Force and working as a full-time executive for Charles Draper Laboratories, a Cambridge, Mass., defense-oriented organization that works closely with MIT. In a nearby suburb, Lynnfield, Bill and Rita owned their “city” house.

One has to struggle to separate the man from his message—his anguished cry that created the Henry’s Fork Foundation. Driven by his dream of “protecting” this particular reach of water, his was a complete commitment.

Bill came from, grew up on, the river banks of the town of Newburg, New York, just a few miles downstream from West Point, on the Hudson. He once told us that seeing the vast Hudson polluted and fishing spoiled by Consolidated Edison’s shore-banked power plants provided the original wellsprings for his extreme antipathy to the proposed Federal Energy Regulatory Commission filings for low-head generators in our Idaho watershed during the late 1970s and early 1980s.

Montana Power had owned a quarter section on the east bank of Upper Mesa Falls since 1913. The very thought that they might put a penstock there triggered his commitment to prevent what he viewed as criminal desecration of God’s environment. “It’ll get screwed up. Just like the Hudson,” said Bill.

Bill had fished the Firehole, the Madison, and the Henry’s Fork over the years before he appeared on our Pinehaven doorstep in August 1974. He was driving his 1965 white 3/4-ton Ford pickup with a camper top. His passengers were his wife, Rita, his mother, and Chestnut, a golden retriever (who immediately made friends with Penny, our golden). Bill’s immediate mission then was to purchase property on which to build a summer home. He did, in North Pinehaven, and then engaged architect Vince Ferrrese to design their dream cabin. Bill and Rita moved in during the summer of 1977.

Bill maintained his position with Draper Labs, so could only spend time on the river sporadically—one week here, three weeks there. But whenever he was in Pinehaven, his standard early morning routine brought him with his coffee cup - half-finished - to our house. Usually, in less than an hour (or about three cigarettes) he would be underway in his pickup or snow machine. Already plagued by balance problems, he seldom walked long distances. By 1982-83 he began to track down the river’s friends and enemies: newspaper owners, power company officials, federal and state bureaucrats, the American Rivers Foundation, lawyers, bird watch-

When he wasn’t fishing the Henry’s Fork, Bill Manlove could most often be found behind the wheel of his pickup.

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er, Idaho’s senators and representa-
tives, the governor, conservation
groups, architects, county
commissioners, environmentalists,
planners, and, of course, fly fis-
ers. From Boise to Sun Valley to
Pocatello he ferreted out his prey,
recording on separate sheets—and
in blunt terms—what he thought
he’d found out, adding his opinion
as to whether he figured they’d be
useful or a liability to his crusade.
Once back in Island Park,
he’d report in with his half-filled
coffee cup. All the while he would
say “My mind runneth over”—an
articulate, convincing Henry’s
Fork Messiah, delivering those wa-
ters from the engines of de-
struction.

Convinced that his cause was
just, that others he trusted agreed
on the need for action, that help
was available and on call, he took
his first steps toward bringing the
river’s well-wishers under a sin-
gle tent. I recall no truly formal
meetings, but there were a fair
number of cocktail or impromptu
dinner gatherings at places like
Bill’s, the Lansche’s, the Long-
well’s, or our house. He cobbled up
a charter and bylaws. Those of us
close at hand (fishing buddies,
Pinehaven friends, those with
whom he consulted as he shared
his dream) became the first di-
rectors, Members (with a capital
“M”), and signators of the legal
documents forming the Founda-
tion. This rather amorphous struc-
ture lasted until simplicity be-
came an overriding need, leading
to new, more obviously democratic
bylaws, and a chain of command
which could be better relied on to
establish understandable policy.

Even as Bill, by sheer will
power, was putting the machinery
in motion which would help carry
out his precept of proper river
protection, he was losing his
years-long battle with multiple
myeloma. He died in the summer of
1986.

But in Mick Mickelson he had
found a true disciple to carry on
his work. It seems self-evident to
me that without Mick’s conviction
and energetic leadership fol-
lowing Bill’s death, the Founda-
tion would have founders. Mick’s
commitment to keeping Bill’s
dream alive was symbolized at our
subsequent board meetings by
Bill’s empty chair next to his.

In sum, this is an outline of
the living power and effect of one
man’s belief and actions. And fi-
nally, when this river most need-
ed help, there turned out to be two
committed, strong-willed men who
stepped forward as its champions.

Jack Thomas was one of the found-
ing directors of the HFF. He
served on the board and as sec-
retary of the board until 1993. ❖

HFF Recognizes
Conservation Efforts

Through the years, the HFF
has recognized several people for
their significant contributions to
the work of the Foundation. The
Foundation has two awards: the
William Manlove Award and the
HFF Conservation Award.

In 1987 the first recipients of
the awards were Dr. William S.
Platts who received the William
Manlove Award, and Ed Chaney,
who received the HFF Conserva-
tion Award. Both men were rec-
ognized for their contributions to
the design and construction of the
ten-mile solar powered electric
fence near Harriman State Park.

Louis Racine, prominent Idaho
attorney and member of the Idaho
Fish and Game Commission, was
awarded the William Manlove
plaque in 1988 for his efforts on
behalf of the river and Idaho
wildlife.

In March 1988 the Foundation
presented the Upper Snake River
Fly Fishers the HFF conservation
Award for their assistance with
stream improvement and fencing
projects.

Roger Doughty, HFF board
member from Boise, was given the
William Manlove Award in 1991
for his part in arranging the dona-
tion of a pickup truck to the HFF
by Intermountain Gas Company to
assist in fishery research. His
son, Aaron Doughty, was named
the recipient of the HFF Conserva-
tion Award for raising $2000 to-
wards the purchase of a snow-
mobile for winter research. Aaron
did this as an Eagle Scout project.

HFF Recognized for Its
Achievements

The Foundation received na-
tional and state recognition in
1988 for its endeavors in pre-
serving the Henry’s Fork. In July
the HFF was a semi-finalist in the
U.S. Department of Interior’s Take
Pride in America awards ceremony
and received a certificate of merit
“For meritorious stewardship of
America’s natural and cultural re-
sources.” In August the Federa-
tion of Fly Fishers presented their
conservation award to the HFF at
their annual conclave in Li-
vinston, Montana. In November
Governor Cecil Andrus presented a
first place in the Take Pride in
Idaho awards to HFF Mick Mickel-
son at a ceremony in Boise.

More recently, Idaho Rivers
United recognized HFF and Jan
Brown for outstanding contribu-
tion to the conservation of Idaho’s
Rivers, and for cooperative efforts
in protecting the Henry’s Fork
Watershed. They presented a cer-
tificate to the HFF in March 1994
at the Idaho Rivers Symposium:
Rivers at the Crossroads. ❖