

## PEOPLE

### 3, 2, 1...Blast Off!

Dee Gibson gets a bang out of teaching, but her vacation is a real blast.

**NOT MANY TEACHERS** have to tack on a safety-oriented "Kids, don't try this at home" disclaimer when they tell their students what they did over the summer. But then, not many teachers are like Gibson, a first-grade teacher in Rockford, Illinois, who spends the summer setting off massive explosions.

As a member of a wife-and-husband-led pyrotechnics team, Gibson entertains thousands of people at air shows around the world each summer by setting off choreographed detonations. Using a carefully controlled mixture of dynamite, gasoline, and other explosives, her crew creates special effects on the ground that appear to air show viewers to be coming from the military planes flying overhead.



She does everything from detonation to safety supervision while another blasting crew wows fans.

Several times Gibson helped the team break the Guinness World Record for the longest wall of fire.

Adventure has been a mainstay in Gibson's life. Raised in Milwaukee, she joined the Women's Army Corps after high school



to see the world. She re-enlisted to earn enough money to fund her skydiving passion. Gibson ultimately ended up in the Army Combat Engineers, where she worked on bulldozers and blasted rocks with explosives to build roads in rural Honduras.

Once all in a day's work, the 20-year teaching veteran now shares her explosive summer vacation stories judiciously. "When I taught second grade, I told the kids what I did and they asked, 'Can you bring in some bombs, Mrs. Gibson?' I got some interesting calls from parents," she laughs. "Now I explain it a little differently."

—PAT TERRY

## 3, 2, 1... Blast Off!

Dee Gibson gets a bang out of teaching, but her vacation is a real blast

By Pat Terry

## Seeing History

Once a logger, always a logger, s

**JOHNSON GREW UP IN OREGON** logs 1940s, an era when giant "steam donkeys" that dragged huge felled timbers from the forest by steel cable. Johnson, like his father, worked as a choker-setter, the logger assigned the hazardous task of cinching the end of a moving cable to a fallen tree.

"The old steam donkeys worked at one speed, so when you set the choker tree, the donkey didn't wait for you to get your hands free of the cinch," says Johnson, a member of NEA-Retired-Oregon. "You worked on its schedule, so you worked on its schedule."

But just as he came of age, the steam donkey was being replaced by gas-powered equipment. The donkey's disappearance led Johnson to change careers.

"I was traumatized," says Johnson. "I was in love with steam engines. I would have been a railroad engineer or to run a steam donkey. When steam went out, I left."

50 neatoday February 2006

Pension perils: Must-read cautionary tales p19  
Using tech to connect students globally p34  
NEA in the late 1800s: The fight for literacy p40

FEBRUARY 2006

# neatoday

## IS SMALLER BETTER?

A practical look inside the small schools movement.

SEE PAGE 24



nea  
NATIONAL  
EDUCATION  
ASSOCIATION

## 3, 2, 1... Blast Off!

Dee Gibson gets a bang out of teaching, but her vacation is a real blast

By Pat Terry

**N**ot many teachers have to tack on a safety-oriented “Kids, don’t try this at home” disclaimer when they tell their students what they did over the summer. But then, not many teachers are like Gibson, a first-grade teacher in Rockford, Illinois, who spends the summer setting off massive explosions.

As a member of a wife-and-husband-led pyrotechnics team, Gibson entertains thousands of people at air shows around the world each summer by setting off choreographed detonations. Using a carefully controlled mixture of dynamite, gasoline, and other explosives, her crew creates special effects on the ground that appear to air show viewers to be coming from the military planes flying overhead. She does everything from detonation to safety supervision while another blasting crew wows fans.

Several times Gibson helped the team break the Guinness World Record for the longest wall of fire.

Adventure has been a mainstay in Gibson’s life. Raised in Milwaukee, she joined the Women’s Army Corps after high school to see the world. She re-enlisted to earn enough money to fund her skydiving passion. Gibson ultimately ended up in the Army Combat Engineers, where she worked on bulldozers and blasted rocks with explosives to build roads in rural Honduras.

Once all in a day’s work, the 20-year teaching veteran now shares her explosive summer vacation stories judiciously.

“When I taught second grade, I told the kids what I did and they asked, ‘Can you bring in some bombs, Mrs. Gibson?’ I got some interesting calls from parents,” she laughs. “Now I explain it a little differently.”

—Pat Terry

