

June 2021

Smokejumper Obituary: Milligan, Thomas "Tom" William (Missoula 1951)

National Smokejumper Association

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Smokejumper Obituary

Milligan, Thomas "Tom" William (Missoula 1951)

Tom, 95, died June 22, 2021, in Driggs, Idaho. He was born September 26, 1925, in Stockton, California. When he registered for the draft at age 18 during WWII, he was living in Stockton.

Bern Shanks (MSO-62): "Tom was a legend to all who knew him. He transferred to Yellowstone N.P. as the fire dispatcher and spent many years as a park ranger and, later in Grand Teton National Park, as a ranger and head of the mountain rescue operation.

"A Navy veteran in the Pacific, he was aboard an ammunition ship when the war ended. I once asked him what life was like during the kamikaze threat late in the war. He answered simply, 'We all expected to die.'

"He told me about walking into Earl Cooley's (MSO-40) office late in the spring and asking about smoke jumping, only to learn the application deadline was long past. Tom then began talking to Earl about fly fishing, a life-long passion. Before he left the office, Earl informed him they always had one or two jumpers would not show up on the first day of training, so if he was there, he would be hired.

"Tom was a vivid storyteller and his description of surviving a grizzly bear attack on he and his wife Sharlene while fishing in Yellowstone was simply, unforgettable. But Tom could talk as enthusiastically about football, boxing, climbing and other sports and read over wide range of fiction and non-fiction. I will miss him."

Tom jumped at Missoula 1951-52 and at West Yellowstone 1953-56. His son, Tim, jumped at McCall 1981, and Redmond 1983-89.

(end of excerpt)