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Smokejumper Obituary: Ratigan, David Gordon (Missoula 1943)

National Smokejumper Association

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Smokejumper Obituary

Ratigan, David Gordon (Missoula 1943)

David was born November 20, 1925, in Missoula, Montana, where he lived his entire life except for a tour of duty in the military and a short teaching assignment in the Brady elementary and high school program in Brady, Montana.

David started smokejumping in Missoula in 1943, five months before turning 18 years of age. The smokejumper program had difficulty hiring men in 1943 because those that were physically qualified and were 18 or older were recruited or drafted for military duty during WWII. Only five of the 59 experienced smokejumpers from 1940, 1941, and 1942 fires season returned for 1943. From the Civilian Public Service program, sixty-two Conscientious Objectors (CO) whose religious faiths prevented them from engaging in combat but who still wished to serve their country, were trained as smokejumpers. David was not a CO, but somehow, he was hired as a smokejumper even though he was 17 years of age. He had at least one fire jump in 1943, in Yellowstone National Park.

After spending the 1943 summer as a smokejumper, and one month before turning 18, he enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps on October 18, 1943, in an infantry battalion at Camp Elliott, San Diego, California. On May 13, 1945, he was wounded in action and discharged in January 1946. David returned to smokejumping at Missoula in 1946 and 1947. In 1946, he had three practice and six fire jumps and in 1947, three practice and seven fire jumps.

David married in 1948 and was a student for five years at the University of Montana, majoring in education. He and his wife had careers in education in Missoula and did not have children. David was also active in local politics running for local Ward Offices in Missoula. David died February 26, 1993, at the age of 67 from colon and pancreatic cancer. He is buried in Saint Mary Cemetery in Missoula, Montana.

(end of excerpt)