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## Smokejumper Obituary: Musgrove, William F. (Missoula 1941)

National Smokejumper Association

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# Smokejumper Obituary

## Musgrove, William F. (Missoula 1941)

Bill was born in Hecla, South Dakota, on May 27, 1917. In 1919 he moved with his parents to White Sulphur Springs, Montana. Following high school graduation in White Sulfur Springs, he worked as a Forest Guard on the Lewis & Clark NF and began attending the University of Idaho. In 1941, at age 24, he was as a smokejumper in Missoula, Montana, making three fire jumps. In September of that year, Bill and three other smokejumpers and a doctor, after weather prohibited them from jumping, hiked 20 miles from the Big Prairie Airstrip into a wilderness area to successfully rescue a young woman who had been shot in both knees in a hunting accident.

In January 1942, Bill entered the U.S. Marine Corps. After graduation from the Marine Corps Officers' Training School in San Diego, he was commissioned as a second lieutenant in August 1942. In November 1943, Bill participated in an heroic assault on the Tarawa Atoll in the Gilbert Islands in the WWII Pacific Theater of Operations. He manned a machine gun on his landing craft knocking out enemy entrenchments and after reaching the beach, "Montana Bill" relentlessly hunted snipers for two days and on the third day found TNT and blasted enemy pill boxes. Bill received a commendation by U.S. Pacific Fleet Admiral Chester W. Nimitz for his services on Tarawa.

On May 21, 1944, as a Marine, Bill was on board a ship in Pearl Harbor when heavy blasts of exploding ammunition and intense heat occurred. Despite the explosions and heat, Bill remained on board making tours through all quarters aiding the injured to the main deck for evacuation. For his heroism in rescuing injured men on board, Bill was awarded the Navy and Marine Corps Medal, the highest non-combatant award for heroism in the Marine Corps and Navy. The Award cited Bill for continuing the rescue work with complete disregard for his own safety.

After smokejumping and military service, Bill returned to the University of Idaho, teaching science at Arco, Idaho, and earning a MS degree in science in 1953. In 1954 he relocated to Kingman, Arizona, and continued his career as a science teacher. While in Arizona, Bill was a Major in the Arizona National Guard.

Bill lived for a while in Farmington, New Mexico, but died in Kingman, Arizona on December 25, 2006. He is buried at Mountain View Cemetery in Kingman.

*(end of excerpt)*