

October 2006

Smokejumper Obituary: Handrich, Willard D. (Missoula 1945)

National Smokejumper Association

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Smokejumper Obituary

Handrich, Willard D. (Missoula 1945)

Willard died October 6, 2006, with his son and daughter-in-law when their boat capsized while on Lake Superior. He was born December 25, 1916, in Fairview, Michigan. Willard grew up on a 160 acre farm near Fairview and grew up loving hunting and trapping in addition to hard work on the farm. The family was involved in the large Mennonite community.

Willard attended a one-room school for the early grades and graduated from Fairview Agricultural H.S. in 1935. Following a short course in Dairy Production at Michigan State University, he took a job working for the county dairy association. He followed that with three years with the Soil Conservation office. Willard wanted to get out of office work—"My body was getting soft and I figured I need to work for the Farmer's Co-op and lift 150 pound bags of seed."

In 1942 he was drafted into Civilian Public Service. Willard was accepted into the CPS smokejumpers at Missoula for the 1945 season and made seven fire jumps during that season.

Willard was an ordained minister and pastored the Grand Marais Mennonite Church for 31 years. He was also a self-employed woodsman and owned and operated Grand Marais Industries from 1966 to 1978.

(end of excerpt)