

In Memory of Dr. Sidney L. 'Sid' Groff, 91

Retired Montana State geologist Dr. Sidney L. "Sid" Groff, of Butte, died Jan. 17, 2011, in Butte, after an extended illness.

He was born to Forest and Laura (Warren) Groff April 7, 1919, on a ranch near Victor, nestled in the Bitterroot Valley. Sid was raised and attended schools in Victor and graduated from Victor High School in 1937.

Sid was predeceased by his wife, U.S. Marine Corps Master Sgt. Billie Groff, in 1971, his parents, and brother, Gene.

Survivors include his wife, Shirley Groff of Butte; two brothers, a daughter, two grandsons, two great-grandchildren, three stepchildren, and three stepgrandchildren.

Following graduation from high school, Sid enrolled in the University of Montana, Missoula, took courses in the U.S. government pilot training program and earned a private pilot's license in addition to a Bachelor of Arts degree in geology, graduating in May 1941. Sid was selected for the U.S. Naval Aviation flight training program, earned fighter pilot certification in April 1942, and was transferred to the Marine Corps.

Wanting to put his flying skills to use in the war effort as quickly as possible, Sid completed additional training at Quantico, Va., with final training in twin-engine aircraft at San Diego before being transferred to the VMD 154 photo reconnaissance squadron at a forward base supporting the combat operations on the island of Guadalcanal.

Sid was involved in administration and maintenance responsibilities in addition to flying dual-mission B-24 bombers. He was very proud of his distinction of being recognized for having designed and constructed the first "fly and odor proof" Marine outhouses in the South Pacific.

As a marine captain, Sid was rotated to Cherry Point, N.C., to participate in training new combat aviators. Sid married Billie Lockridge of Honey Grove, Texas, also on active duty as a marine and was promoted to the rank of major with a new position as executive officer of a twin-engine attack bomber squadron, before being transferred with his unit back to combat operations in the Philippines. Sid was transferred to a Marine air base in California after the war and served until 1949 when he chose retirement from military duty.

Sid earned a master's degree at the University of Montana in geology in 1954 and was accepted as a doctoral geology student at the University of Utah, earning his doctorate in 1959 after returning to Montana for the position of chief, Groundwater and Mineral Fuels Division, Montana Bureau of Mines and Geology.

Sid very early recognized the possibility and potential of vast coal deposits in the Fort Union Formation of eastern Montana, western North Dakota, and northeast Wyoming. He was appointed to the newly formed General Coal Technical Advisory Committee of the Montana Department of Interior. In recognition of his efforts in developing and reclamation of the coal resources of the State, the Montana Senate passed a resolution honoring Sid. He played a key role in obtaining research funds and became the Montana State Geologist in 1971, retiring in 1983 after 26 years of distinguished service.

Sid led several legislative efforts that still benefit the Montana Bureau of Mines and Geology; two of the most prominent were a bill that established a full-time state geologist to head the MBMG, and establishment of the MBMG's budget as a separate line item within the university system budget.

In March 1979, Sid married Shirley Hand Hunt of Butte. He and Shirley continued to reside there participating in numerous community service activities.

