

Robert Briedwell Forbes (1924- 2001)

Dr. Robert Briedwell Forbes, 77, died December 1, 2001, in Bremerton, Washington. He was born on March 14, 1924 in Aberdeen, Washington to Robert W. and Hope (Briedwell) Forbes, members of pioneering families in Washington and Oregon. He graduated from high school in Port Townsend in 1941 and attended Linfield College for one year before enlisting in the Army. During World War II he served in both the European and Pacific theaters. He was awarded two Purple Hearts and the Silver Star.

Bob received his bachelor of science degree at the University of Washington in 1950 and his doctor of philosophy in geology in 1959. His thesis was on the geology of the Juneau Ice Field. From 1950 to 1956, during the Korean War, he worked as a civilian Arctic and mountaineering expert for the Army. In 1959 he returned to Alaska with his family, joining the faculty of the University of Alaska, Fairbanks. He loved Alaska and the challenge of Alaska geology, much of which was unknown at the time.

Bob was a long-time faculty member at the Geophysical Institute and the Department of Geology and Geophysics at the University of Alaska in Fairbanks. He was Geology department chairman from 1965 to 1969. He retired in 1978 to embark on an ambitious consulting career. In conferring the title of professor emeritus upon him, the university noted that he had won the esteem of students and colleagues, and earned an international scientific reputation for himself and the university. He spent more than forty field seasons in bush Alaska and published many scientific articles.

Among the highlights of his professional career were two trips to Antarctica. In 1957 he was awarded the Department of the Army's Outstanding Performance Award for his Antarctic research. A mountain ridge in Antarctica bears his name. Another highlight was a sabbatical year in 1963-64 in Japan, with his family, as visiting research professor in petrology at the University of Tokyo.

In 1986 Bob was appointed State Geologist and Director of the Alaska Division of Geological & Geophysical Surveys. During his directorship, he remained active in his geologic research. At his retirement in 1991, the Alaska Legislature passed a resolution honoring him for his outstanding contributions as state geologist and throughout his career. Following his retirement in 1991, he and his wife, Norma, returned to Washington state.

For Bob, being a geologist was more than a career- it was a fundamental part of his identity until his final illness. His friends, colleagues, and family will greatly miss his wit, humor, and stories of his many adventures.