



## Robert "Bob" Burns Branson

April 10, 1927 - November 30, 2018

ABITA SPRINGS, La. -- Robert Burns (Bob) Branson, a geologist, outdoorsman, and community volunteer, died Friday, November 30, 2018, at Christwood Retirement Community in Covington, Louisiana, just days after visiting with his grandchildren and other family over the Thanksgiving holiday. He was 91.

A memorial service to celebrate his life will be held Saturday, December 15, 2018, at 10:00 a.m. in the Garden Room at Christwood Retirement Community, 100 Christwood Boulevard, in Covington, La.. Visitation will follow.

Bob lived in the Greater New Orleans area for 53 years, the last 30 of those in Abita Springs. He had, since June, been living at Christwood as he endured Parkinson-like symptoms. Bob's family is especially thankful to the staff at Christwood for the loving care provided to him during his final months.

Born in 1927 in Winfield, Kansas, to Alice Young Branson and De Hellik Branson, Bob was the middle of three children of a farming family. They moved several times during the Great Depression, living at times without indoor plumbing or electricity, in the communities of Burden, then Latham, and finally in Cambridge, Kansas, where Bob attended high school and continued to help his father grow wheat and tend the animals on the family's farm. He would often recall the monotony of milking the family's cows or the joy of driving a combine at night to cut wheat, stopping sometimes for a quick nap under the Kansas sky.

As a boy, Bob began listening to the St. Louis Cardinal baseball games on the radio and continued to follow them throughout his life.

Bob was playing football with pals in December of 1941 when they learned that the Japanese had attacked Pearl Harbor. Less than four years later, on his 18th birthday, he was drafted into the United States Army as the war in the Pacific raged. After helping his father cut wheat one last season, he reported for duty in Tyler, Texas.

While he was in basic training, the Japanese surrendered. Bob served in the Army of Occupation in Germany from March to December 1946 as a company clerk, and he had the unique perspective of transporting German prisoners of war from camps in the United States back to Germany. He was honorably discharged in February of 1947 as a three-stripe buck Sergeant.

As an avid reader and student of the history, sacrifice, and suffering of World War II, Bob was reluctant to attach any glory to his personal military service. At the request of the National World War II Museum, he recorded his memories of basic training and post-war Germany. He also donated to the museum German propaganda literature he brought back as a souvenir.

On a tour of the museum in 2016, when stopped by school children and asked about how the war had impacted him, Bob told them that the GI Bill--which had paid for his education and the college educations of hundreds of thousands of veterans--dramatically changed the trajectory of his life by allowing a poor Kansas farm boy to get a college education and become a professional scientist.

Upon discharge from the Army in 1947, Bob enrolled at Oklahoma University, where he earned undergraduate and graduate degrees in geology. Bob was hired by the Standard Oil Company of California, today known as Chevron, where he worked until 1988. His early posts were in Grand Junction, Colorado (where he recalled paying \$22.50 a month for a room), Natchez, Mississippi, Jackson, Mississippi, and Pensacola, Florida, where he met his wife Benjie Hodges Branson. Eventually, he and Benjie settled in the Algiers area of New Orleans where they raised their two sons.

Bob worked for Chevron for 36 years in the exploration and production divisions, and he was part of the team that discovered and developed the Tuscaloosa Trend. He was active for decades in the New Orleans Geological Society, serving as president in 1989-90. After retiring from Chevron, and even as he began gardening and volunteering, he continued to work independently as a geology consultant, most recently for Pennington Oil Company. He finally retired as a geologist at the age of 89.

A Midwesterner by tone and nature, he nevertheless adopted many of the traditions and delights of his adopted home of New Orleans, including a passion for the New Orleans Saints, Dixie and Jax beer, and boiled shrimp. With the eye of an outsider, he captured many of the city's eccentricities and landscapes through his hobby as an amateur black-and-white photographer.

Bob was an avid hiker, gardener, marathon runner (despite being a childhood polio survivor), and outdoorsman, often paddling on Black Creek in south Mississippi in a home-built fiberglass canoe. He was a scoutmaster of Troop 199, based out of Aurora United Methodist Church in Algiers. Bob was recognized as the volunteer of the year for the Court Appointed Special Advocate program, and he later worked as a volunteer tax preparer for the AARP. He also served for a time on the Abita Springs Planning Commission. He was a long-time member of the Unitarian Universalist Church.

Bob is survived by his wife of 57 years, Benjie Hodges Branson. Bob is also survived by his son Fred Loren Schroeder of Abita Springs and Fred's daughter, Nili Schroeder of Las Vegas, Nevada; and by his son Reed Lincoln Branson, Reed's wife Beverly Ann Ray, and their children, Robert Burns Branson II and Margaret Borroum Branson of Jackson,

Mississippi. He is also survived by his younger sister, Mary Alice Branson Garrison of St Marys, Kansas; by his sister-in-law, Arleen Wesseler Branson of Lyons, Kansas; and by several nieces and nephews and their families.

He was preceded in death by his brother, Abraham Lincoln (Linc) Branson and by his brother-in-law, Robert Keith (Bob) Garrison.

In lieu of flowers, memorials may be made to the Nature Conservancy of Louisiana, Post Office Box 4125, Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70821.

