



Wessel, Donald R

Rapid City, SD

382nd Inf HQ Co

Donald Wessel, 88, of Rapid City, died on Thursday, March 26, 2009 at a local nursing home.

Don Wessel was born in 1921 to John and Cecil Wessel. He had seven brothers and three sisters. Don and his siblings attended a rural school near their farm until moving into Mobridge. His mother, Cecil, was probably his biggest influence in his life. She had a strong faith that she instilled in all of her children.

At age 14 he wandered the country by hitch-hiking or riding the rails, oftentimes sleeping in boxcars. He never told his stories to his children but relayed them to his grandchildren in later years.

Don was given an honorary graduate degree in the 1990s by Mobridge High School. He was very proud of the honor bestowed on him and his brother Alvin. They received the award because both had entered the service during WWII without finishing their high school education. If he had a favorite subject it probably would have been math or chemistry. In another time he could have gone to school to become an engineer, but instead became one without an education.

Don married Frieda Rieger in Mobridge on August 3, 1941. Their first child, Donna, was born on June 7, 1942.

Don enlisted in the US Army and served until he was wounded in a battle on Leyte Island in the Philippines. After he was discharged from the hospital he returned to his family in Mobridge. Their second daughter, Diane was born Feb. 1, 1944, followed by Don on Jan. 22, 1946 and Joyce on July 5, 1950.

He became an employee of the Mobridge City Water Department where he eventually became the head of the department. The current Mobridge water treatment plant was built under his supervision before Lake Oahe inundated the old one.

Don was an intelligent individual who came from the school of hard knocks and fought his way to being the best at what he did. He was offered the job to be the head of the Rapid City Water Department and moved his family to Rapid City in 1961. He accepted a similar position in Huron in 1967 that he held until August of 1969. He was then recruited by the mayor of Rapid City to return as Water Superintendent.

He remained the head of the department until he retired in 1983 at the age of 62. He initiated new concepts in meter reading that saw extra revenue collected for the city. He was in charge when a new water plant was built for the city. He went 96 hours without sleep after the 1972 flood left Rapid City without water for five days. He and his crews repaired eight damaged water mains, conducted water tests required by the State Health Dept. and serviced 1200 leaking lines. All during this time he lived with the fact that he and Frieda had lost their home that was on Janet Street.

Don was recognized for his contributions to the water profession during his career. This included the SD Water and Wastewater Associations Nalco Award in 1953 while at Mobridge and the Price-Rees Award in 1967 at Huron. He was an honorary member of this association. In October of 2000 he was awarded the Gold Water Drop award by the American Water Works Association. He remained a member for fifty years and was recognized for his participation in promoting their programs and goals.

Don enjoyed hunting, fishing and golfing with his friends and family. He was active in the local VFW, American Legion, the Masons, and the Elks. He helped his wife with the only flower shop in Mobridge in the early 1960s called Wessels Florist. He and Frieda also became involved with friends who enjoyed square dancing. He was a master craftsman, remodeled and added on to the family home, and always took pride in his yard.

After he retired, he and Frieda traveled throughout the country to visit their family and friends and enjoyed camping in the Black Hills. Woodworking became a passion for him and he enjoyed making small furniture items for his kids and grandkids. Their yard was filled with flowerbeds, home-made birdhouses and other projects that they both created.

He is survived by his wife, Frieda Wessel of Rapid City; three daughters, Donna Hansen of Rapid City, Diane (Bingo) Kindt of Mobridge, and Joyce (Duard) Pfeifle of Billings, MT; one son, Don (Ann) Wessel of Dothan, AL; two brothers, Archie (Fern) Wessel and Rev. Glen (Joy) Wessel, both of Rapid City; two sisters, Evelyn Anderson and Phyllis (Elmore) Blain, both of Rapid City; sisters-in-law, Marcella (Paul) Wessel and Marcella Wessel (Richard); 10 grandchildren, Bob (Tina) Hansen, Kristin (David) Nelson, Don (Pam) Hansen, all of Minnesota, Greg (Gwen) Kindt of Montana, Lisa Fischer of South Dakota, Stef Kindt of Nebraska, Sean (Susannah) Wessel of Alabama, Amy (Sean) Darby of Florida, Kord (Dawn) Pfeifle of South Dakota, and Jenny (Rob) Derksen of Texas; 20 great grandchildren; one great great grandchild, and extended family during the past year at Clarkson Mt. View Guest Home.

He was preceded in death by his parents, John and Cecil Wessel; brothers, John Jr., Robert, Alvin, Richard and Paul; his sister, Grace; and sisters-in-law, Mary and Alice Wessel; and brother-in-law, Lloyd Anderson.

Visitation will be at Kirk Funeral Home in Rapid City on Sunday from 2pm to 5pm with a 3pm public prayer service, and then at the church for one hour before services.

Services are set for 11:00am Mon., March 30, 2009 at Westminster Presbyterian Church in Rapid City with Rev. Robert Jacobs and Rev. Glen Wessel officiating.

Interment will be at 2:30pm Monday at Black Hills National Cemetery near Sturgis, with military honors by VFW Post 1273 of Rapid City.

A memorial has been established. Friends may sign Donalds online guestbook at www.kirkfuneralhome.com.