Dr. Hans Karl Stauffer, a pioneer of international geological work for oil exploration, died January 13, 1989, in Palo Alto, California, at the age of 97.

During his career with Royal Dutch Shell, which began in 1919 and spanned more than 20 years, he mapped vast areas of Venezuela, Trinidad, Indonesia, and New Guinea. Geological field work then was not only an intellectual challenge, but an adventure as well. He was closely involved with Shell's early discoveries of the La Paz and Bolivar coastal fields in the Maracaibo Basin of Venezuela, whose ultimately producible reserves are today calculated at about 50 billion barrels.

Hans was born in the village of Gümlingen in the canton Bern, Switzerland, on April 6, 1891. His father was a teacher and a long-time member of the Bern teachers' choir. From him Hans acquired a love of teaching and music; from childhood on, he was determined to become a teacher. Both Hans and his younger brother Fred were highly talented artists, and indeed, Fred became well known as a painter in Switzerland.

After teachers' college, Hans worked for two years in the Kienthal in the Bernese Oberland as a teacher in a one-room schoolhouse. He loved to roam in the mountains, and as he contemplated his salary of about $400 per year (on which, even in 1913–1914, one could hardly marry and support a family), he decided he could combine his love of the outdoors with a better income by becoming a geologist. This decided, he entered the University of Bern, and with some time at the University of Geneva, studied straight through to a Ph.D. in geology in 1919. The map of his thesis area in the Bernese Alps is still a part of the geological map of Switzerland.

With large green eggs painted on his suitcases, so he could distinguish them readily from those of the many World War I refugees, Hans traveled to The Hague, Holland, to join Royal Dutch Shell. His first assignment in The Hague was to write a summary report on the oil possibilities of Switzerland, which he judged to be not very good (Switzerland still has only one producing gas well).

In 1919, Hans sailed for Venezuela as one of the first Shell geologists to go there. Although he at first spoke no Spanish, his knowledge of Italian and French helped him communicate. In those days in Venezuela there were no maps, few roads, and almost no cars. The normal form of transport was the mule. Hans selected the best looking mule he could find and started mapping the basin areas of the country. His mapping was controlled with a mule-calibrated pedometer for distance and a Breithaupt geological compass for orientation.

He did extensive mapping in both eastern Venezuela and in the Maracaibo Basin. He mapped the structures west of Lake Maracaibo and much of the Falcon area, as well as areas east of the lake and in the Merida Andes to the south. He was in Maracaibo in 1923 when the Shell well Los Barrosos-2 blew out on the east shore of Lake Maracaibo and formed a river of
oil that flowed through the main street of the village of Cabimas. To calculate the flow rate of the well, Hans measured the depth and speed of the oil river in the street and came up with a rate of flow of more than 100,000 barrels per day. This well focused the oil industry's attention on Venezuela and particularly on the Maracaibo Basin.

Hans worked in Venezuela until 1928, after which he worked in Indonesia for five years, much of that time mapping in Borneo, working out of jungle camps. A trip from Holland to Indonesia was his first extensive flying trip. It took more than two weeks, as they flew only during daylight hours and always waited for good weather.

From 1933 to 1936, Hans worked in Point Fortin in Trinidad, directing exploration efforts in the southern part of the island. After Trinidad he spent some time in the main office of Royal Dutch Shell in The Hague as South America coordinator. Although he found the work at company headquarters interesting, he missed the direct contact with geological work. His chance to go back to the field again came when he was asked to head a Royal Dutch Shell exploration group in New Guinea.

The work in New Guinea was the first large-scale test of the use of aerial photographs for geological mapping, and it was a great success. Working under him were Swiss, Dutch, English, German, French, Italian, and Malay geologists and other staff. Hans liked to tell the story of the monolingual geologists from the Standard Oil Company of California who visited his camp and office complex. As he showed them around he spoke to all of his people in their native languages, as he always did. The California geologists couldn't believe what they were hearing! After his work in New Guinea was completed, Hans returned as chief geologist to Maracaibo, Venezuela, where he remained until his retirement in 1941.

Hans had originally planned to retire near Bern, Switzerland, but because of World War II, and largely on the advice of Frances and Hollis Hedberg, he settled with his family in Palo Alto, California. Here he started his third career, after those of teacher and exploration geologist. He became a research associate in the School of Earth Sciences at Stanford and maintained that position for the rest of his life. During World War II he also taught classes in jungle survival techniques to soldier-students, and for about a year, he worked in the Military Geology Branch in the Pentagon as an expert on New Guinea.

In retirement, Hans again began to paint. He was a superb landscape painter with watercolors and he delighted friends and family with gifts of his paintings. Hans also loved the opera and was a regular patron of the San Francisco Opera for many years. His stories of opera stars such as Caruso and Gigli, and his comparisons of them with some of today's performers, enchanted younger opera lovers.

Hans had a remarkable ability to establish rapport with people of all ages, backgrounds, and nationalities. He had good friends on many continents, and as his contemporaries died, he continually developed new friendships with younger people.

His wife Olga, neé Schneeberger, whom he married in Switzerland in September of 1925, was a teacher and talented amateur stage actress and musician, and she accompanied Hans throughout his worldwide career (except in New Guinea). She died in 1971. Hans is survived by three sons: Henry, a medical doctor at the University of California; Karl, a geologist with Chevron Overseas Petroleum Inc.; and Peter, also a geologist, with the U.S. Geological Survey in Menlo Park. Eight grandchildren and two great-grandchildren also survive him.

Hans will be missed but not forgotten by his family and a multitude of friends.
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