Memorial to Jesse LeRoy Dally
1923–1999

DAVID J. DALLY
Houston, Texas

Jesse L. Dally died on February 7, 1999, in Houston, Texas, due to complications following lower aortic aneurysm surgery. He was born September 3, 1923 on a farm south of Pittsburgh, near Uniontown, Pennsylvania. His father was Philip LeRoy Dally and his mother was Jessie Belle (Franks) Dally. Jess’s father was already second generation in the oil and gas business, working as landman and field operations manager for Mike Benedum (Plymouth Oil, and others) of Pittsburgh. Jess worked many summers through high school and college as a roustant for his father.

In 1941, Jess entered West Virginia University, pursuing a degree in petroleum engineering. Early in his sophomore year, he withdrew to enlist in the Army during World War II. He strongly believed in his patriotic duty to defend his country. He became a sergeant in the 303 Combat Engineer Battalion, 78th Infantry Division. Jess participated in the Battle of the Rhine, the Battle of the Bulge, and the crossing at the bridge at Remagen. In separate actions, he was awarded two purple hearts, the bronze star, and the silver star. Prior to action in Europe, the Army sent him to MIT for specialized training in civil engineering. During demobilization in France, the Army sent Jess to Biarritz American University for specialized training in geology and paleontology. His experiences there kindled his passion for geology.

Jess returned to West Virginia University and completed his B.S. in geology instead of petroleum engineering in 1947. He completed his M.A. in geology from Columbia University in 1949. This was a stepping stone on his way to completing his Ph.D. in geology from Columbia University in 1956. During his years of dissertation research, Jess joined the staff of West Virginia University to teach geology for seven years as well as serve as director of the Geology Museum. He served as a cooperating geologist on the West Virginia Geologic and Economic Survey. He advised the Oil and Gas Committee of the state senate of Maryland concerning legislation to regulate lease pooling and well spacing. He returned to the oil and gas business by helping to organize and serving as president of the Devonian Oil and Gas Company of West Virginia. During this time, Jess also met the love of his life, Marjorie L. Renninger, and they married in 1950.

Soon after completion of his doctoral degree, Jess joined Esso Standard (Turkey) in 1956, first as chief paleontologist and then as supervisor of the Central Lab. He and Marge lived in Ankara, Turkey, for a little over two years, and they made many lifelong friends there. Following the birth of their son, David Jesse, they returned to the United States.

Jess joined Pan American Petroleum (Amoco) in 1958 as a staff geologist in Fort Worth, Texas. There, he and Marge completed their family with the birth of their daughter, Suzanne Lynn. Shortly thereafter, Amoco transferred Jess to Midland, Texas. He became project geologist in the West Texas district. This began his continuous relationship with West Texas geology,
one that he valued and enjoyed to the day he died. In 1968, he left Amoco to partner in the Desana Corporation, where he served as vice president of exploration. He successfully prospected throughout West Texas, including the Delaware Basin, Central Basin Platform, Midland Basin, Eastern Shelf, and Val Verde Basin.

Jess decided to open his own prospect-generating shop in 1979. He concentrated his efforts on the Eastern Shelf, particularly in Runnels County, and in the eastern Val Verde Basin. In 1987, he joined forces with his son, David, and relocated the business to Houston. Jess and David both enjoyed a rich and fulfilling partnership for the final 12 years of Jess’s life.

Jesse L. Dally lived a full and rewarding life, in which geology was a part of every day. He joined the Geological Society of America in 1951. He was a cheerful, positive, and very amiable man. Those who knew him may remember him best by his sincere and infectious laugh. Jess was a wonderful, caring father to his family and a stalwart friend and business partner. He was very well respected by his peers; the geologic community has lost a valuable asset. He is survived by his wife, Marjorie, son, David, daughter, Suzanne, and two grandchildren, Eric and Sean.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY OF J. L. DALLY

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