

Don Nell (1923-2003)



Donald F. Nell, 80, a former president of the LCTHF and one of the founders of its Headwaters Chapter, died of an aneurism on August 5 at his ranch near Emigrant, Montana.

"Don passed away just as he would have wanted - chasing a bear off his porch at his beloved ranch in the Paradise Valley," said his long-time friend Bob Doerk. A native Montanan and a retired real-estate agent, Nell grew up on a ranch near Livingston and lived most of the year in Bozeman. He served in the Marine Corps during World War II.

Nell's passion was Lewis and Clark. In addition to his service as an officer of the Foundation, he gave his extensive collection of expedition-related books to its library in Great Falls. He was a contributor to *WPO* and the coauthor, with John "Jack" Taylor, of *Lewis and Clark in the Three Rivers Valleys*. He led tours of the Lewis and Clark Trail and on the day of his death was scheduled to help the Gallatin County Museum with an exhibit about the Corps of Discovery. "Don never quit learning, and he enjoyed being a mentor to young people interested in history," said another old friend and member of the Headwaters Chapter, R. G. Montgomery.

Doerk admired Nell for his toughness, directness, and ability to "cut to the chase" of any issue under discussion. "Anyone who knew Don also knew that behind his gruff exterior was a teddy bear," he said. "When, long before the Foundation had any paid staff, I was collecting its mail, he answered hundreds of requests for information about the Corps of Discovery. He also responded to many local and regional requests that didn't come through the Foundation." Regarding his toughness, Doerk recalled hiking with Nell on the hills behind his ranch less than six weeks after a quintuple bypass. "He was carrying a cross-saw because he knew there was a log that needed cutting on the trail. I could hardly keep up! He was happy just to be up in the mountains, appreciating every day he had left. That was Don."

He is survived by Barbara, his wife of 54 years; four children (Bill, Jim, Nancy, and Bob); and seven grandchildren.

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(Nell was a Director of the Foundation, 1985-1986; Vice President, 1986-1987; President Elect, 1987-1988; and President, 1988-1989.)

*Prepared by Bob Gatten, 2011*