



LCOL James M. Henson, USAAF Ret. passed away Sunday evening, May 13th at Gallatin Rest Home with his loving wife of 61 years at his side. Jim was born in Livingston, MT on November 26th, 1921. His parents were Earl and Bessie (Forney) Henson. He grew up on family ranches in the Paradise Valley, attended rural schools and graduated from Park County High School. Jim was a 3rd generation Montanan – a member of the

Sam Forney family, who homesteaded in the Pine Creek area. His youth was typical of that era in Montana. He earned his spending money trapping in the Absaroka Mountains, hunted from an early age, fished the creeks and the Yellowstone, and enjoyed a close knit family with four brothers and many cousins. He was a member of the Pine Creek Methodist Church.

In February 1941, Jim, with a brother and two cousins, joined the Army Air Force. He subsequently went to Officers Candidate School, on to Cadets and became a bomber pilot. He flew B-24's over Germany from an American base in Southern Italy.

On Jim's return to the United States near the end of the European phase of World War II, he became engaged to Merry Lou Saunders while on leave to Livingston, MT. Merry Lou and Jim were married on October 8th, 1945 in San Bernardino, CA and traveled to a new assignment at McDill AFB in Florida. In 1946, due to an illness in the family, Jim requested a discharge and they returned to Livingston, where Jim was employed by Nash Finch Company and remained very active in the Air Force Reserve. Jim was recalled to active duty in 1951, trained on B-29's at Randolph AFB in San Antonio and was assigned to Kadena AFB in Okinawa where he flew missions in the Korean War.

On his return to the States, Jim was assigned to Carswell AFB, TX to train on the Air Force's new bomber, the largest ever built, the B-36. During this time he enjoyed being 1st pilot on the crew that flew the B-36 segments in the Jimmy Stewart movie Strategic Air Command. He was Aircraft Commander of a crew that was chosen to fly Senator Barry Goldwater during his visit to Carswell. While at Carswell Jim was assigned temporary duty in Europe and Africa and began training at Castle AFB, CA on the new jet-powered B-52. On his return Jim began his assignment as a B-52 Aircraft Commander.

In 1959, Jim and crew were transferred to Clinton-Sherman AFB, OK as part of a new bomber wing for SAC. Jim and his crew were honored by being chosen to land the first B-52 at the new base and were featured on the cover of the base telephone book. In 1961 Jim was transferred back to Castle AFB for a stint training B-52 pilots. In 1963 he happily returned to a plane and crew as Aircraft Commander, transferring to March AFB, CA. While at March he had two TDY tours to Guam and flew alerts for the Vietnam conflict.

Jim had always planned to serve 25 years in the Air Force and then go home to his beloved Montana. He applied for a timely discharge but, because the Vietnam War was heating up, the Air Force did not release him until a year later. At the time of Jim's retirement in December

1966, he and his radar man, Bill Taylor, had been together longer than any other team in SAC and were recognized for that achievement.

Jim and Merry Lou returned to Billings. The family had stayed together through all of Jim's stateside assignments, but now the grown children remained in college in California. Jim returned to his fishing, hunting and active avocation of golf – activities he shared with his good companion, his brother Claude. While in Billings Jim studied accounting and in 1969 he and Merry Lou moved to Yellowstone National Park, where he worked for the Yellowstone Park Company, usually on a seasonal basis with time out to travel overseas (and vacation in Las Vegas!). Jim served as Location Controller at the Old Faithful Inn, as Manager of the Old Faithful winter lodging facilities, as Traveling Auditor for several seasons, and one winter substituted as a snow coach driver and travel guide – which he thoroughly enjoyed!

In 1974, wanting to be closer to his daughter and grandsons (and closer to a golf course!), Jim took a position as Controller at the bookstore at MSU. Jim and Merry Lou found Bozeman to be “the last best place” and spent 30 plus happy years here with friends and family.

Jim loved sports all his life. He played softball with the Paradise Valley teams and basketball on an American Legion team in Livingston. He was selected as one of five men to be on the Air Force bowling team competing at a National Tournament in Fort Worth, TX. He was also an avid golfer and shot his “hole in one” at Valley View Gold Club in Bozeman. He played handball into his sixties. Jim was a Bobcat Booster for some time and held reserved season tickets to men's and women's games for many years, spending many hours cheering with family and friends and critiquing the game the next morning with his coffee group.

Jim led a full life serving his country with distinction through two shooting wars and the Cold War, raising, guiding and supporting a family who loved him dearly, and being a solid friend to many. Jim's wry sense of humor, his quiet strength, and his quick offers to help when he saw a need were appreciated by all who knew him.

Jim was preceded in death by his son Thomas, who died at the age of six, his parents, and his brothers Merle and Dayton Henson. He is survived by his wife Merry Lou, his daughter Kristin (Bryan) Dunn of Great Falls, his son James W. (Lindsey) Henson of Louisville, KY, his brothers Claude (Carol) Henson of Billings and Herbert (Ellen) Henson of Fontana, CA, his three grandsons, Thomas (Carol) Gnauck and Panzer (Tammi) Gnauck of Bozeman and Bradley Henson, currently in law school in Virginia. His four great grandchildren, Tanner, Taryn, Madde and Sadie, all of Bozeman, were the great joy of his life. He also is survived by his niece Holly King of Billings, nephews Don Henson of Bozeman and Richard Henson of Billings, with whom he was very close over the years, and numerous other nieces and nephews.

A celebration of Jim's life by family and friends will be held during the summer at the family cabin in the Gallatin Canyon. A memorial marker will be placed in the Mountain View Cemetery in Livingston near his son's. Memorial donations can be made to the Public Lands/Water Association, Inc., PO Box 2, Ramsay, MT 59748 or the charity of your choice.