

ALERT CENTERPIECE FEATURED

DICK GROUT: D-Day vet, father and community leader dies at 104

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Dec 19, 2024



World War II veteran and Traverse City resident Dick Grout greets friends following the Jan. 30 ceremony in which he was bestowed the French Legion of Honor by the Consul General of France Yannick Tagand at Kirkbride Hall in the Village at Grand Traverse Commons. Grout died Thursday at the age of 104.

Record-Eagle file photo/Jan-Michael Stump



TRAVERSE CITY — Dick Grout’s positive attitude, kindness and a tendency to put others before himself had a way of bringing out the best in people, friends and family agreed.

Donna Mouzard, Grout’s daughter, said her dad always showed interest in meeting others, even in his final days when he asked the man installing his hospital bed about his life. That love for making personal connections taught Mouzard and her siblings how to live in the world, and the kindness and interest he showed to others made them feel good.

That, in turn, led other people to show that same kindness and interest to keep that good feeling going, Mouzard said.

“He loved people, he was kind, but he wasn’t kind because it was necessary, he was kind because he liked people,” she said.

Grout always thought of others first when volunteering for Suttons Bay Congregational Church through various committees, said Chuck Cady, Grout’s friend of more than 40 years.

“He would clearly bring out the better in all of us, if for no other reason than to say I feel that others around me are more important than I,” he said. “That stretches back to his military background but also his community leadership.”

Grout, 104, died Thursday at his home in Cordia in Traverse City, said Karen Puschel Segal.

She recalled how her friend and fellow International Affairs Forum emeritus board member believed a positive attitude was so important in life. That meant saying “yes” to many things, from getting involved through the Rotary Club of Suttons Bay-Leelanau County in various ways to helping found the International Affairs Forum and more, Puschel Segal said.

His attitude carried through even during moments of grieving, and she praised his ability to put significant loss in context as another part of his life, then moving onto the next phase.

Cady also saw how Grout would say “yes” to any committee or fundraiser that popped up through the Rotary Club, up to and including jumping out of a plane — three times.

The third time was in July 2022, when Grout and 49 others jumped in tandem with professional skydivers with Skydive Grand Haven. Each jumper sought pledges to raise money for Rotary International’s contribution to the Global Polio Eradication Initiative.

“His attitude was, as long as I can support Rotary, I will do what I can,” Cady said.

Grout seldom missed a Sunday service at Suttons Bay Congregational Church, Cady said. Cady and wife Susan agreed to “carpool” with Grout in later years, calling it as much because Grout disliked having to give up driving but didn’t mind sharing a ride and catching up with friends.

Grout felt like a part of the church family, and it was fellow member and World War II veteran Bob Maynard who helped Grout find a way to talk about his wartime experiences after staying quiet about it for so long.

“Those two, in finding a way to talk about a horrifying part of their life, they were able to talk about it, even giving public discussions within our church family,” Cady said.

From there, Grout would retell the story many times of how on June 6, 1944, he led a platoon of 112th Engineer Combat Battalion troops in the first wave to land on Omaha Beach at Normandy. He and the rest were quickly pinned down by German soldiers firing from the bluffs, until infantry moving inland slowed their fire.

“So for the first, I don’t know, almost an hour, we were just trying to find shelter somewhere where we would be not hit,” Grout said in 2020.

A brave bulldozer driver with explosives strapped to the roof made it to a stone wall blocking a two-track that would let tanks and other vehicles off the beach, Grout said.

Before they made it off the beach, he saw how his platoon reacted to being exposed to small arms and mortar fire for the first time. Some kept their focus while others were overcome. For whatever reason, he fell into that first group, although he didn’t blame the latter one bit.

“This is what you had to do, so you did it,” he said in 2019. “I guess I was lucky that way.”

Grout fought on in the Allied push to Germany through France and Belgium, helping the advance by building or fixing bridges as they went. He was working to bridge a river in the Ardennes on Dec. 16, 1944, when a German mortar sprayed his legs and back with shrapnel, knocking him unconscious. It was the opening salvo in the Battle of the Bulge, a failed German counteroffensive Grout mostly read about in papers after his injury.

After recuperating in England, Grout went to Germany where his platoon was leading prisoners of war in cleaning up Munich’s devastation. He had enough “points” to go home, but first stuck around for a bit to marry a Scottish woman named Norma. She was a member of the British Women’s Air Auxiliary Force he met while training in England for the invasion.

After the wedding in Dumfries, the two moved to Boston where Grout started a long career working with pension plans. They went from there to Los Angeles, then metro Detroit before moving to a small farm in Northport after Dick Grout retired. After Norma died, Dick Grout remarried in 1986 — his second wife Marion died in 2014, according to her obituary.

Cady recalled how Grout loved to support local theater and musical organizations by attending shows, along with traveling the world with a group of Suttons Bay seniors in the 1980s and 1990s.

Grout would eventually receive the French Legion of Honor in January in recognition for his part in liberating France from Nazi Germany. Mouzard said how she recalled her brother insisting on limiting the ceremony crowd to 50 people, then agreeing to 75 when she pointed to calls pouring in from people asking to join.

Instead, 200 people packed Kirkbride Hall to watch the Honorable Yannick Tagand, France’s General Counsel to the Midwest, bestow upon Grout France’s highest honor.

‘He’s well-known in the community,’ Mouzard said. ‘And always smiling, always smiling — except maybe when he was conducting a meeting, and then it was pretty serious.’

Cady said Grout always saw himself as a representation of the many others who served whenever he received such an honor.

He was always flattered and appreciative, but wanted to share the accolades with those whose service went unrecognized.

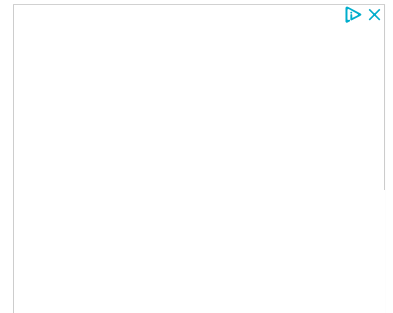
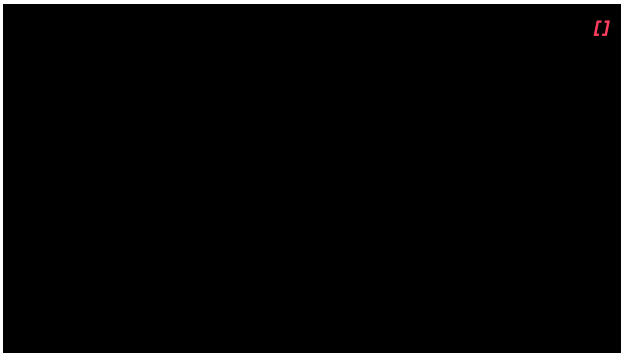
Toward the end of such a full life, Grout didn’t hesitate when asked about his most proud accomplishment: being a father and a husband.

Cady said he recalled hearing Grout say the same, adding he was a steadfast friend as well. He took Grout to mean that his war experience didn’t define him.

Puschel Segal echoed this, noting that Grout wasn’t alone in pushing his wartime experiences aside as he got on with his life. Only recently did he become so outspoken — she interviewed him about his experience in 2021, and he spoke to numerous classes and youth groups.

“In some ways, it’s the war service that brings him to our attention, because that’s what we tend to focus on in today’s world, is the longevity and the World War II service and all the rest,” she said. “But yes, he would describe himself in those very straightforward terms of what he did with his life: it was his family, it was his community, and just making little differences everywhere he went.”

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