

Prof. Dr. Gerd Hildebrandt passed away

Prof. Dr. Gerd Hildebrandt, former head of the Department of Aerial Imaging and Remote Sensing at the Albert-Ludwigs University Freiburg, passed away on December 11, 2017, at the age of 95.

Professional background

Prof. Hildebrandt was born on 27 November, 1923 in Leipzig. After studying forest science at the Tharandt University, he began his scientific career in 1950 at the Institute for Forest Management, Humboldt University in Eberswalde. In 1953 he set up the Department of Forest Surveying and Aerial Photo Analysis there. In 1957, he had to flee the GDR due to political persecution and continued his further scientific work at the Institute for Forestry Management at the Albert-Ludwigs-University under Professor Karl Abetz. In 1969 he was appointed head of the Department for Forest Aerial Imaging and Aerial Interpretation, renamed in 1980 to Aerial Photography and Remote Sensing, at the University of Albert Ludwigs and headed this until his discharge in 1989.

Research activities

He made outstanding research contributions in the use of color infrared images and the creation of aerial image-based elevation models for forest applications. He also established the European system for the aerial image-based recording of novel forest damage and was an international pioneer in the emerging development of information fusion from different digital geodata sources.

In retirement, he summarized the unbelievable sum of his publications and research experiences in the field of remote sensing in the book "Remote Sensing and Aerial Imaging for Forestry, Vegetation Mapping and Landscape Ecology", published by Wichmann Publishing in 1996.

Committees and awards

Prof. Dr. Gerd Hildebrandt was Dean of the Faculty of Forest Sciences from 1970 to 1972, and member of the Senate of the University from 1974 to 1978. Furthermore, for many years Hildebrandt was the editor of the Freiburg University Journal, thereby making a significant contribution to the visibility of university research both internally and externally.

As a longtime member of the State Forestry Council Baden-Württemberg, he supported the further development of the practical forest inventory and installation procedures. As a member of the advisory board of the *Food and Agriculture Organization* (FAO), the *European Space Agency* (ESA), the *European Commission* and the *Society for Technical Cooperation* GTZ (today *Society for International Cooperation*, GIZ), he also set standards in practical applications at international level. After reunification, as Chairman of the founding committee and with great dedication, he successfully led the Forest Research Institute in Eberswalde into the modern research landscape of the Federal Republic of Germany.

Hildebrandt was also active in the ISP (as the ISPRS was called until 1980). He was Technical Commission President of Commission VII entitled "Interpretation of Data" from 1976 – 80 and organized an ISP Symposium in Freiburg in 1978, cosponsored by ISP and the International Union of Forest Research Organisations. The proceedings of this symposium comprise nearly 2.400 pages, a clear sign of the importance of remote sensing only 6 years after the start of the first Landsat satellite.

Hildebrandt received a number of awards, the highlight being his appointment as "Honorary Member of the Society of American Foresters". This was the first time a researcher outside the United States was honored in this way. Since 1995 he was also an Honorary Member of the German Society for Photogrammetry, Remote Sensing and Geoinformation (DGPF).

With the passing of Prof. Dr. Gerd Hildebrandt, we lose an extraordinary scientist who has made a lasting impact on the research field of remote sensing. The Albert Ludwigs University, the Faculty of

Environment and Natural Resources and the staff of the Department of Remote Sensing and Landscape Information Systems will always keep an honorable memory of him.

Prof. Dr. Barbara Koch, Fernerkundung und Landschaftsinformationssysteme, Albert-Ludwigs
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