Vincent Z Peterson died peacefully in Berkeley, California, on 17 May 2007. He was 85. He was professor of high-energy physics, first at Caltech and later at the University of Hawaii, where he founded — and then headed — the high-energy physics group until his retirement in 1992.

Vince was born and raised in Galesburg, Illinois, and went to Pomona College, majoring in physics. During the Second World War, he was assigned to special projects in antishubmarine detection in the US Navy. After the war, he attended the University of California, Berkeley, where he received his PhD in physics with W.K.H. Panofsky, before joining Caltech, where he remained for 12 years.

In 1962, he was hired by the University of Hawaii to set up a programme in high-energy physics. Hawaii had become the 50th state of the US in 1959 and had decided that its university should become a major research institution. Vince was able to get a sizeable grant from the Atomic Energy Commission and brought in Bob Cence and Vic Stenger in 1963 to form the core experimental group. He developed a close collaboration with the Moyer-Helmholtz group at the Lawrence Radiation Laboratory in Berkeley, while his own group began assembling the apparatus needed for bubble chamber analysis in Hawaii. Vince had a great feeling for what was important in the field and made sure that the Hawaii group was always involved in forefront experiments, particularly through close collaborations with Berkeley, Fermilab and several large university groups.

Among various important experiments, Hawaii was involved in studying CP violation in K⁰ → 2γ at the Bevatron, transition radiation at SLAC, charmed particle production, weak neutral weak currents and QCD with neutrinos at Fermilab.

Detector development was one of Vince’s continuing interests and he maintained close ties with colleagues at high-energy labs. In particular, he encouraged and supported the work of Hawaii group-member Sherwood Parker at Berkeley and SLAC. This included the development of wire chambers for external muon identification, silicon microstrip detectors and pixel detectors.

Vince did not neglect the theoretical side of high-energy physics but arranged for Peter Dobson and San Fu Tuan to come to Hawaii to start a theory group. Starting in 1965, Vince and San Fu organized a series of highly successful topical conferences that took place every other summer until 1985. At one memorable conference in 1973, Don Perkins of Oxford announced the discovery of weak neutral currents at CERN, to the great excitement of the other attendees, including Richard Feynman.

Vince was part of the international committee that organized conferences on neutrino physics and was conference director for the Neutrino ’81 meeting in Maui. In the 1980s, the experimental group split into accelerator and non-accelerator physics and the Hawaii DUMAND Center was formed with the purpose of building an undersea muon and neutrino detector off the coast of the Big Island of Hawaii. Vince was the director, with Vic Stenger as associate director and John Learned as technical director. Although the project was eventually cancelled, Hawaii pioneered the field of VHE neutrino astrophysics, which is still under active development today with experiments in the Mediterranean and Antarctica. With Vince’s encouragement, Learned and other group members played major roles in the IMB proton-decay experiment in Cleveland and the Super-Kamiokande experiment in Japan. The 1998 paper announcing the first evidence that neutrinos have mass included Learned, Stenger and other group members as co-authors.

Vince and his wife Elisabeth (Tess) always treated the members of the group as family, holding many Sunday barbecues at their house in Kailua close to the beach. They spent sabbatical years in Rome, Oxford and Geneva, always keeping in touch with friends around the world — many of whom visited them in Hawaii. Vince led a long and fulfilling life, and he will be remembered and missed by his family and friends.

Andrea Peterson and Vic Stenger.