



William Richardson Thompson

May 17, 1924 - April 22, 2011

William R. "Tommy" Thompson, Retired Deputy Director ATF, dies at 86.

William R. Thompson once told his family that he used his "good judgment" to turn down an offer by G. Gordon Liddy in the 1970s to become part of the Nixon White House administration.

Instead, he concluded a successful 26-year federal government career in 1975 after rising to the ranks of Deputy Director of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF) in Washington, D.C.

Thompson died Friday evening, April 22, 2011 in Newnan after an extended illness.

Born in Seale, Alabama on May 17, 1924, Thompson was the youngest of seven children and the son of a U.S. Postal Service mail carrier. After the death of his father, he moved to Atlanta in 1938 to live with his older brother, George and his wife. He worked as a bag boy at Big Star after school and helped his classmates at both Joe Brown Middle School and Tech High with their homework to help pay \$50 a month to live in a boarding house near Gordon Street.

He enlisted in the Army in 1943 and was stationed at Pearl Harbor for 37 days before heading to Guam to repair airplane radios. It was in radio school that he met his first wife, Mildred Burke, of Donaldsonville, GA and they were married just before departing for the war.

After the war, he returned to Atlanta and graduated from Atlanta Law School in 1949 before starting his career with the Internal Revenue Service as a field

agent or “revenuer” as they were often called in the day. Agents were responsible for enforcing the ban on private production and sale of whiskey or “moonshine” as it was known. Patience was one of the prerequisites for the job as agents waited in the field for hours and sometimes days until the perpetrators returned to the stills to be arrested.

Thompson began his career in the Miami field office. It didn't take long for him to move up in the ranks to a supervisory capacity. His IRS department eventually became a division of the Treasury Department known as the ATF. Thompson was promoted to Regional chief of the Southeast office in Atlanta in the late 1960s before taking the Deputy Director slot in Washington D.C. in 1973.

Upon retirement, Thompson moved back to Georgia and settled in Newnan. He and his wife became active in the Newnan First United Methodist Church and concentrated on helping senior citizens in the community. Under the Thompson influence and constant urging to the Coweta County Commissioners, a center for the senior citizens was erected on Hospital Road in Newnan that is known as the Tommy Thompson Senior Citizen Center. "If it hadn't been for this man standing in front of the County Commission with the proposal to do this building, it never would have gotten built," said then Coweta County Commissioner Robert Wood in an interview with the Newnan Times Herald in February, 2000. "Let me tell you, he wore the county out to get this building," said Wood.

After the death of his first wife in 1984, Thompson married Barbara Sprayberry Hawk in 1985, and the two lived at their home in Newnan since that time.

The funeral is Monday, April 25, 2011 at 2:00 pm at Newnan First United Methodist Church with Dr. Med Roach & Rev. Gary Parrish officiating. Burial will follow at Forest Lawn Memorial Park. The visitation is Sunday evening between 6:00 – 8:00 at McKoon Funeral Home, 38 Jackson St, Newnan. In lieu of flowers, the family requests donations to Newnan First United Methodist Church, 33 Greenville St, Newnan, GA 30263 or to the Tommy

Thompson Senior Citizen Center, 29 Hospital Rd, Newnan, GA 30263.

Condolences can be expressed online at www.mckoon.com

Mr. Thompson is survived by his wife, Barbara; son & daughter-in-law Sam & Debra Thompson of Lake Arrowhead, GA; daughter Cassandra Thompson Gunn of Newnan; step-daughter & her husband, Debra & Bruce Gourley & their daughter Elizabeth of Manhattan, Montana; and two grandchildren, Ashley Gunn Norvick of Newnan and William Gunn, Jr. of Carrollton.

McKoon Funeral Home (770) 253-4580

Cemetery Details

Forest Lawn Memorial Park

656 Roscoe Road
Newnan, GA 30263

Previous Events

Visitation

APR **24**. 6:00 PM - 8:00 PM (ET)

McKoon Funeral Home
38 Jackson Street
Newnan, GA 30263
(770) 253-4580
care@mckoon.com

Service

APR **25**. 2:00 PM (ET)

Newnan First United Methodist Church
33 Greenville Street
Newnan, GA 30263

Tribute Wall

JG

“ Dearest Cass, I was so sorry to hear of your dad's passing. The few times I saw him he was always smiling and I know he was a treasure to all of you. I lost my daddy 17 years ago and it's still as fresh as it was then. You and your family will be in my thoughts and prayers.

Jennie Stone Gillihan - April 26, 2011 at 07:43 AM

GW

“ Bobby and I want to express our condolences to you and Debra. We are thinking of you at this difficult time.

Geraldine and Bobby Welch - April 26, 2011 at 07:33 AM

MH

“ Mr Thompson was very good to me as I worked for ATF. I was at the Regional Office before he went to Washington. I retired from ATF in 1997 and went away from GA. I was a clerk when I come to work at the Regional Office. I transferred there from the GA district Office where Mr. Lane was the head and Bill Richardson was his assistant. (this was written so the family would know that I worked at ATF and knew Mr. Thompson) My prayers go out to all of you in your loss of a fine man.

Myrna Gilleland Huntley - April 25, 2011 at 10:23 PM

CC

“ We will miss Mr. Tommy; you are in our prayers.

cliff and val cranford - April 25, 2011 at 12:57 PM

FF

“ I am sorry to hear of Mr. Thompson's passing. He was a good man and I enjoyed knowing him through the years. I am sorry I could not attend the visitation or the funeral. My prayers are with all of you.
Sincerely, Frank Farmer

Frank Farmer - April 25, 2011 at 11:32 AM

MW

“ Barbara and Family: We are saddened by the death of Tommy. He was a dedicated member of Newnan First, and contibuted so much to the entire Newnan community. We appreciated his support and friendship during our pastorate there in the eighties. Our thoughts are with all of you who loved him best. Max and Trois Wall Athens, GA

Max & Trois Wall - April 25, 2011 at 10:52 AM

RO

“ Dear Barbara & Family: We send our condolences & prayers in the promotion of William R. "Tommy" Thompson to Heaven to be with our Lord & Savior, Jesus Christ. I have known Mr. Thompson since 1963/1964, when he was Special Agernt in Charge in North Carolina. (I was a new agent in TN) He was an outstanding leader/supervisor and a fine Christian man. He greatly influenced my life & career with ATF. Barbara; you can be very proud of the devotion & care you gave him during the last couple of years. "You are a very special person" Please take care of yourself & if we can be of service, we would be honored. Love, Riley & Rachel

Riley & Rachel Oxley - April 25, 2011 at 10:10 AM

VF

“ Mrs. Barbara and Cassey, I am deeply sadden in your lost for it's my lost as well, because setting with him brought joy to my life and soul for he told things that will help me to become a better person, he filled my life as grand father teaching me about god's great love and to me in my heart, he was one of god's earthly angles. thanks for allowing me to sit with him, as he brought joy god's great joy,

Vell Fearby - April 25, 2011 at 01:17 AM

JC

“ Dear Mrs. Thompson, I was saddened to read of Mr. Thompson's death today. I often think of the times we saw each other at the grocery store, and I admire the flag he has displayed in your front yard. John

John Caldwell - April 24, 2011 at 10:55 PM

W(

“ An old friend, we were in Treasury School at Jekyl Island, Ga. in 1950. Our paths crossed many times in our careers. He was one of the " good guys "

W.A. Boone, Jr (Billy) - April 24, 2011 at 09:27 PM

JG

“ We would like to extend our sympathy to you the Thompson. May the Good Lord above continue to Bless and keep you.

James & Katie Gay - April 24, 2011 at 08:06 PM

EG

“ Sorry to hear of the loss of Mr. Thompson. "Tommy" Thompson interviewed and hired me as a Special Investigator with ATF in 1969. At the time I was a Florida Beverage Agent stationed in Miami. That was the only time I ever meet Mr. Thompson but he was for sure well thought of in ATF and by those with whom he came in contact. May he rest peacefully now and forevermore.

Edward Garrison - April 24, 2011 at 03:02 PM

BU

“ I was a subordinate ATF manager to Mr. Thompson and always found him to be dedicated and fair.

Bruno Uptagrafft - April 24, 2011 at 01:45 PM

BJ

“ We were so sad to hear of Mr. Tommy's death. Our children enjoyed getting to see him out in the yard and running up to talk to him. He will be missed very much by everyone in the neighborhood. May God be with your family during this time and always.

Barry and Ruby Ann Jackson - April 24, 2011 at 09:52 AM

PJ

“ Sam, Deb and others, I wish you peace and prayers during this time in reflecting on the life of your father. His stellar service to the Federal government and community exemplifies his selfless caring. I enjoyed the uniqueness of his obituary. I know your memories of your dad are eternal. Sincerely, Paul Johnson

Paul Johnson - April 24, 2011 at 01:29 AM

RW

“ Miss Barbara and Debra, I was so sorry to arrive home today and see that Mr. Tommy had passed away. Please know that my thoughts and prayers are with you both. Debra safe travels to you and your family as you travel to and from Newnan. Love, Ruth Jones Warren

Ruth Jones Warren - April 23, 2011 at 10:40 PM

GP

“ Dear Barbara and family, I was saddened to hear of the death of a very dear friend. I cannot tell you how I enjoyed talking to Tommy when he would visit me in the church office. That was one thing I missed most when I retired. He was a special friend and he will be missed by this community and the church. May God grant you peace in knowing that he now has that "new body" and is not longer suffering. Love, Gerrie

Gerrie Petty - April 23, 2011 at 03:27 PM