



Thomas D. Harrell Jr.

July 10, 1925 - August 29, 2023

Thomas D. Harrell, Jr. age 98 passed away on August 29, 2023, at the North Carolina State Veteran's Home following a period of physical decline. Born July 10, 1925, in Pulaski, Virginia, he was the only son of the late Mina Busic Harrell and Thomas D. Harrell, Sr. He graduated from Pulaski High School in 1943. Six weeks later at age 17, with World War II underway, he enlisted as an aviation cadet in the U.S. Army Air Corps. Told that he was ambidextrous and had a slight hesitation deciding which hand to use to do a task in flying, which was a critical amount of time, he was washed out. He served in the 5th Ferry Command Headquarters, Love Field, Texas, then was sent overseas to Headquarters, India-China Wing, Air Transport Command, Karachi, India. He became a radio operator and over the course of the World War II he flew 103 missions to 43 countries on five continents. In the course of service, he left the US initially via Miami, FL, and returned to the US through San Francisco, CA, flying all the way around the world, returning home before the age of 21 after the end of the war. He entered the University of Virginia in 1946. While there, he served as Capt., Commanding; Company A, U.S. Army Transportation Corp, ROTC, 1948. He left UVA in 1949, taking a job at radio station WNVA in Norton, VA as staff announcer, was promoted to reporter and then to sales. In 1951 he was hired by Rollins Broadcasting as sales manager of WFAI, Fayetteville, NC, and in 1952 became sales manager of WFNC AM-FM in Fayetteville.

In 1956, he bought WSTP-WRDX AM-FM radio stations in Salisbury, NC with

partners Ted Austin, program director of WFAI and Jack Ickner, chief engineer of WFNC. With FCC approval, the three began operating WSTP October 6, 1956. He bought out his partners in 1960. He served as president and general manager of WSTP-WRDX from April 1956 to June 1995, growing the station from six employees to 34.

In broadcasting, he also served as the president and general manager of Hi-Sonic Associates Sound Systems, a contracted and background music provider, from 1957 to 1984; on the advisory board of WDAV radio station; on the board of directors of the National Association of Broadcasters in Washington, DC; as a board member of the Radio Board of Ethics; on the board of directors of the Radio Advertising Bureau, New York, NY; on the board of governors of the Mutual Broadcasting System, New York, NY; and was a member of the North Carolina Association of Broadcasters, Raleigh, NC. He received industry recognitions for his dedicated service from those agencies and others, including the Earle Gluck Distinguished Service Award from the NCAB.

Locally, he served five terms on the Salisbury-Rowan Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors, including four terms as vice president for Development/Membership. Among projects for the Chamber, he was co-chair for the then-new Chamber headquarters building on West Innes, for the Keppel Auditorium/Hedrick Little Theatre building at Catawba College, and for Rowan Technical College, now Rowan-Cabarrus Community College. He was a member of the Sales & Marketing Executives Club of Salisbury, serving as its president. He was a guest lecturer in broadcast marketing for the business school at Catawba College. He was a founding member of the Salisbury Symphony Orchestra, serving on its board of directors, and a founding member of Piedmont Players Theatre, playing the male lead in its first production, "Bell, Book and Candle". He was a member of the Lions Club throughout his broadcasting career, a member of Rotary International, a member of the Salisbury Planning Board, and a member of the Rowan County Planning Board, serving as chairman. He served as a member of the board of

directors of F&M Bank.

A lifelong Presbyterian, he was a deacon and chair of the diaconate at Franklin Presbyterian Church in Salisbury, later continuing as a member of First Presbyterian Church, Salisbury. He was co-founder with Dr. Dan Sansbury of the Rowan County Presbyterian Men's Association, an association of 11 Presbyterian churches actively meeting from 1982 to 2000, combining traditionally black and traditionally white churches of the denomination county-wide. He served as a representative for the Presbyterian men to both the Concord Presbytery and Salem Presbytery of NC. He was president of the Mid-Atlantic Synod Men's Council, Presbyterian Church USA, representing North Carolina, Virginia, Maryland, Delaware and District of Columbia, with 1525 churches and 328,000 members.

He assisted with the establishment in 1995 of the non-profit status of Richard's Coffee Shop in Mooresville, NC, to preserve its continuation as a Veterans Coffee Shop and military museum following the demise of its founder. Originally Pat's Coffee Shop, it was renamed in tribute to its founder Richard Warren.

From 2003 on, he was Basha Commander of the Metrolina Charlotte Region of the China-Burma-India World War II veterans' group and was "last man standing" as of his passing. In 2014, with veteran Thelma Luckey, he co-founded the weekly Frontier Coffee Shop for veterans in Salisbury, NC. He was a supporter and volunteer at the Price of Freedom Museum in Salisbury. In November of 2017 he was awarded North Carolina's highest civilian honor, the Order of the Longleaf Pine, and in April of 2019, he was inducted into the North Carolina Military Veterans Hall of Fame for his many efforts in support of veterans.

In addition to his parents, he was predeceased by his wife, Sylvia Wiseman, his only sister Dorothy Harrell Grimsley and her children.

He is survived by a daughter, Amy Harrell Williams (husband Kelly) of Mooresville, NC, nieces, great-nieces, great-nephews and cousins.

He greatly treasured his friendships with his honorary sons, daughters, and honorary grandsons and granddaughters both in the U.S. and Mexico.

The family expresses gratitude to the nurses and staff of the North Carolina State Veteran's Home, and additional special thanks to First Presbyterian Church of Salisbury for their continued support to him during the loss of his wife and following decline in health.

Memorials may be made to the following:

The Frontier Coffee Shop, c/o 801 Cruse Rd. Salisbury, NC 28146; the Price of Freedom Museum, P.O. Box 273, China Grove, NC; Richard's Coffee Shop/Welcome Home Veterans, 165 N. Main Street, Mooresville, NC; the Museum of Radio & Technology, P.O. Box 7972, Huntington, WV; the First Presbyterian Church music program, 308 W. Fisher St., Salisbury, NC.

The family will receive friends from 11-12:15 PM Wednesday (Sept 6) at Lewis Hall at First Presbyterian Church. A memorial service will follow at 12:30 PM at First Presbyterian Church sanctuary, officiated by Dr. Randy Kirby.

Graveside will follow at 2PM in the U.S. National Cemetery, Statesville Blvd location with military rites conducted by the Rowan County Honor Guard.

Summersett Funeral Home is serving the Harrell family. Online condolences may be made at www.summersettfuneral.com.

Cemetery Details

Salisbury National Cemetery

501 Statesville Blvd.
Salisbury, NC 28144

Previous Events

Visitation

SEP 6. 11:00 AM - 12:15 PM (ET)

First Presbyterian Church
308 W. Fisher St.
Salisbury, NC 28144

Family will gather in Lewis Hall

Memorial Service

SEP 6. 12:30 PM (ET)

First Presbyterian Church
308 W. Fisher St.
Salisbury, NC 28144

Tribute Wall

PK

“ Tom Harrell was a visionary in so many ways...from a war hero to a national leader in the broadcasting industry. I learned to know him when I began "pestering" him to allow me to moderate an hour-long program on Saturday mornings with a representative from Salisbury, East, West, North and South giving news each week. I remember that Dr. Judy Grissom, former Rowan-Salisbury Schools Superintendent, represented North Rowan on the program. Also on the program, which we called "High School Highlights," was the playing of rock and roll music which was not played anywhere else on WSTP. It took many meetings of begging for Tom to allow me to proceed. Most of the weekly programs took place in the WSTP studios; however, we did a series of programs on site at a downtown department store and that was a pretty big deal back in 1962-63! We continued our friendship after the program ended. I found Tom to be very intelligent and he always felt free to express his opinion to me, which I appreciated very much. My prayers are with Amy and other family members and friends. Tom was one of the good guys!

Phil Kirk - September 02, 2023 at 10:50 AM

JO

“ Tom will always remain my memories as a kind and warm hearted person who offered me his hospitality and came to visit us to the happiest occasion my life. A beautiful, full of compassion loving man that will never be forgotten. Thank you Tom. Have a nice trip.

Jorge - September 01, 2023 at 04:55 PM



“ *Country Basket Blooms was purchased for the family of Thomas D. Harrell Jr..*



September 01, 2023 at 11:49 AM



“ *Tom was living proof that age really is "just a number." In spite of our 20 year age difference, I always thought of him as my contemporary. I will forever treasure our hours of intellectual sparring, but it's his wicked sense of humor and hearty laugh that I will miss most. Godspeed Tom.*

Bob Sidi - September 01, 2023 at 08:19 AM



“ *While the veterans were meeting at Thelma's restaurant, I had the privilege to sit beside him when he came over to the microphone and spoke. He was such an eloquent speaker that I just really enjoyed listening to him no matter what he was saying! He also gave me comfort while grieving over another veteran and friend after his passing. My prayers go out to all his family. Ken Cline*

Ken Cline - August 30, 2023 at 10:39 PM