



Thomas Upton Sisson Jr.

September 9, 1932 - August 31, 2020

FLORIST NOTE: PLEASE DELIVER ALL ARRANGEMENTS BY 3PM TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 8, 2020 TO OUR LEWES LOCATION.

Thomas Upton Sisson Jr., 87, of Rehoboth Beach and Paris, France, passed away peacefully on August 31 at his home in Rehoboth Beach, of cancer. Tom was the beloved husband of Mary Mallory Marshall (the former Mrs. Stuart Bowen Sr.), who survives him; the beloved father of his three sons Edward, Thomas, and Patterson, by his beloved first wife, Mary Winslow (who died in 1999); the beloved stepfather of Mary Mallory's children Stuart Bowen and Sophie Schubert; the beloved grandfather of seven, as well as step-grandfather of another seven; and the beloved great-grandfather of three (all surviving).

Tom was born September 9, 1932, in San Diego, California, to Thomas Upton Sisson and Edith Grey Nance. As a child during World War II, Tom followed his mother to various Navy postings on the Atlantic and Pacific coasts while his father, a career Naval officer, fought the Germans in the Atlantic, the "Vichy" French in North Africa, and the Japanese in the Pacific.

After graduating St. Albans School in Washington D.C., in 1950, where he was chosen Senior Prefect, Tom followed his father's footsteps into the U.S. Naval Academy (class of 1954) where Tom graduated in the top 2 percent of more than 800 midshipmen.

Tom then began a stellar 30-year Navy career. Originally posted to destroyers, Tom sought the greater adventure and camaraderie of submarines, becoming in 1957 the junior officer aboard the diesel submarine Wahoo, out of Hawaii, where the Executive Officer (second-in-command) was Bill Crowe, the future Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and then Ambassador to Great Britain. Admiral Crowe specifically mentions Tom with praise in his oral history compiled by the Navy historical office.

This began Tom's 15-year career in submarines, from 1957 into 1972, broken only by a two-year stint at Stanford University to earn a Master's Degree in Political Science, and time ashore in training programs. Being 6 foot 4 inches tall, Tom always was the tallest

man aboard every submarine – another half-inch and he would have been barred from submarines altogether, due to height. Every mission he took throughout his career, Tom had to bunk “knees-bent” because no bunk was long enough for him to stretch straight and relax. This was quite a hardship considering most of his missions were 60 days long, and the rest of the missions longer – that is how strongly he wanted to serve in submarines.

The opening of the submarine nuclear power program brought Tom into the orbit of the famed and feared Admiral Rickover, where Tom excelled in nuclear power school. Tom was assigned to the nuclear attack submarine Shark as Reactor Control Officer, while Shark was still under construction. This made Tom a “plank owner” of the Shark.

Shark, with Tom running the nuclear reactor, in 1961 left the Norfolk, Virginia, navy base to make the first cruise of a U.S. nuclear-powered submarine into the Mediterranean Sea, where Shark welcomed aboard the King, Queen, Prince, and Princess of Greece, and the future King of Spain, for a several-hour voyage, including a dive, and allowing the Queen to stand on the sail-plane while Shark, running on the surface, made such a bow-wave that the splash soaked the Queen’s feet and legs, leaving her to pad around barefoot aboard for the rest of the cruise, while her shoes and stockings dried – one of Tom’s favorite stories. The Queen, a great friend of Rickover, was delighted.

Tom then became Engineering Officer of the nuclear missile-deterrent submarine Abraham Lincoln, home-ported in New London, Connecticut, supply base in Scotland. Tom was on Lincoln in Scotland on resupply when President Kennedy ordered Lincoln to rush to sea on 24-hours-notice at the height of the Cuban Missile Crisis.

Tom then became Executive Officer of the nuclear attack submarine Scamp, out of San Diego, making the kinds of secret spy missions written-up in the 1998 book “Blind Man’s Bluff: the Untold Story of American Submarine Espionage” – a book that closed-mouth Tom and most other members of the “silent service” grumbled ought never to have been written. It was the only way his children learned some of what he had done, more than 30 years after the fact. In about 1999, when Tom, retired, was on the computer at home looking at “google earth” and putting in push-pins to mark significant places in his life, his son Edward happened to walk in, and, having just read “Blind Man’s Bluff,” joked that Dad’s set of pins would all be in spots in the trackless oceans, and that Dad couldn’t tell any of us what any of the pins meant. Tom laughed and agreed – and then told Edward he wasn’t “cleared” to be in the room, and that Edward had to leave.

After his time as Executive Officer of Scamp, the Navy then sent Tom to Stanford University to earn a Master’s in Political Science, and to give him a two-year quiet stay ashore much appreciated by his children.

Upon earning his Master's, the Navy made Tom Commander of the "Blue Crew" of the nuclear missile deterrent submarine Ulysses S. Grant, home-ported in Honolulu, Hawaii, with the supply base in Guam. (Missile submarines have two complete crews, Blue and Gold, which alternate aboard every three months). Tom led Grant on several missile deterrent patrols before taking Grant to Bremerton, Washington, and the Hood Canal Navy base, for conversion and upgrade from Polaris to Poseidon missiles.

Tom commanding the Blue Crew then sailed Grant through the Panama Canal to take-up duties in the Atlantic, home-ported in Charleston, South Carolina. An exciting moment for the boys was when they went to the Kennedy Space Center to watch their father test-fire two missiles, while the boys rode a watching destroyer. An additional treat was that this was the day of the Apollo 15 moon-mission "roll-out" of the gigantic Saturn V rocket, which the boys walked around as it slowly crept towards the launch pad.

After several deterrent patrols in Grant, in 1972 Tom was assigned to the Pentagon in a series of posts advising on nuclear weapons policy, including the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT), and taking advanced studies at the National War College. The Secretary of Defense in 1979 awarded Tom the Defense Meritorious Service Medal for this work, stating that Tom provided "clear, concise answers to major sensitive issues having a direct bearing on national security and policies. Captain Sisson's distinctive achievements reflect great credit on himself, the United States Navy and the Office of the Secretary of Defense."

In mid-1980, Tom received the diplomatic posting of United States Naval Attaché to France, a three-year job, 1980-1983. Then followed a one-year posting as Liaison to the French Navy in Toulon, France. Tom received the Order of Merit for his diplomatic service from the government of France, for his successful efforts to ease the sometimes difficult relations between the two countries, particularly in allowing American nuclear-powered warships to make more frequent goodwill visits into French ports.

Of all those men and women who have earned the praise for military service that we know so well, Tom truly is in the first rank of those who deserve the words: "Thank you for your service."

Tom retired in 1984 to an apartment in Paris, summering in Rehoboth Beach. In retirement, Tom devoted himself first to fly fishing: traveling across the U.S. and Europe, winning a trophy in a nationwide competition in fly-casting, and giving personal lessons in casting to the most avid in the sport.

Tom also took care over the decades to bring his children and grandchildren (both “born” and “step”) to Paris, France, many times, introducing all of them to the wonders of Paris. His children and grandchildren will never forget his thoughtfulness in seeing that they all got the chance to have long visits in the most beautiful city in the world, led by a man who knew the language, the city, its people, its culture, and its cuisine inside-out like a native – which basically he was, beginning in 1980, until infirmity brought the trips to an end in about 2018 – a span of almost 40 years. Tom truly was an American friend to France, and he made all Americans look better in the eyes of the people of France.

As age wore-down Tom’s ability to withstand the rigors of rough river-banks and strong streams pressing on his waders, Tom took up ham radio, fitting-out his Rehoboth Beach house with a large hat-like antenna that catches the curious excited eye of every small boy on the street, fitting-out the back room as a “radio shack” so that he could communicate all over the world, and joining the local Southern Delaware community of ham radio operators.

Born and raised in the Episcopal Church, in mid-1999 Tom felt a stronger call from the Catholic Church; undertook the necessary studies; and was admitted into the Catholic Communion.

A funeral service for Tom in accordance with Tom’s strong Catholic faith – and, by coincidence, also a birthday celebration – will be held on Wednesday, September 9, 2020 (which would have been his 88th birthday), at 11:00 AM at Parsell Funeral Homes & Crematorium, Atkins-Lodge Chapel, 16961 Kings Highway, Lewes, DE, where friends may call beginning at 10:00 AM. Interment with full military honors will be held at Arlington National Cemetery, Arlington, VA, at a later date.

Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and in keeping with safety protocols, social distancing must be observed and masks must be worn during all aspects of funeral services.

In lieu of flowers, contributions in Tom’s memory are suggested to St. Albans School, Mount St. Alban, Washington, DC 20016-5069.

Please sign the online guestbook located on the tribute page.

Cemetery

**Arlington National
Cemetery**

Arlington, VA, 22211

Events

SEP 9 Viewing 10:00AM - 11:00AM

Parsell Funeral Homes & Crematorium-Atkins-Lodge
Chapel

16961 Kings Highway, Lewes, DE, US, 19958

SEP 9 Funeral Service 11:00AM

Parsell Funeral Homes & Crematorium-Atkins-Lodge
Chapel

16961 Kings Highway, Lewes, DE, US, 19958

Comments



“ Condolences to the Sisson Family for their loss. Captain Sisson was one of the earliest members of the Naval Submarine League, and we will share his passing with all our members.

Sincerely,
Tim Oliver
Executive Director

Tim Oliver - September 18, 2020 at 05:22 PM



“ Dear Family,

My name is Josh Tate. I am the President of the Sons of The American Revolution NC Le Marquis deLaFayette Chapter. Captain Thomas was a beloved compatriot who will be greatly missed by our chapter and Sons of The American Revolution as a whole. On behalf of the chapter and Sons of The American Revolution I would like to extend our condolences. You all are in our thoughts and prayers! I am extremely grateful for his service to our nation and to our chapter! I am also appreciative for the sacrifices his family has also made in his service to our country! May God bless your family and comfort you in the days ahead. Thank You for the memories we will be grateful for and forever cherish!

Respectfully,

Compatriot William Joshua Tate and membership

Chapter President
Sons of The American Revolution
LE MARQUIS DE LAFAYETTE CHAPTER
North Carolina Society

W Josh Tate - September 10, 2020 at 02:47 PM



“ I am Anne Ward SIGLER & Tommy Sisson was always “my “handsome “ cousin”. He has made our family proud by his life-long service to our country.

Anne Sigler - September 13, 2020 at 12:22 PM



“ Peaceful White Lilies Basket was purchased for the family of Thomas Upton Sisson Jr..



September 08, 2020 at 04:51 PM



“ Words can be challenging at a time like this. However, those around you care for you, and wish you comfort and peace of mind. William T. Kinker OSC(SW) Retired

Ted Kinker - September 07, 2020 at 09:44 PM



“ Our thoughts and prayers go out to our Compatriot...from the Caesar Rodney Chapter, Sons of the American Revolution. God Speed, and we wish him fair winds and following seas.....

Larry Josefowski - September 04, 2020 at 04:25 PM



“ Beautiful in Blue was purchased for the family of Thomas Upton Sisson Jr..



September 04, 2020 at 12:08 PM