



## Col. Thomas J. Barr (US Air Force, Ret.)

May 17, 1925 - November 6, 2016

Colonel Thomas J. Barr, USAF Retired, age 91, died peacefully on November 6, 2016, in Asheville, NC after a stroke on October 27th. Tom was born in Orlando, Florida on May 17, 1925, to Thomas Raymond Barr and Marna Johnson Barr.

Tom was preceded in death by his parents; his wife of 45 years, Peggy Ramsey Barr, who died in 1994; his son, James Ritchie Barr who died February 3, 2016; and his second wife of 12 years, Pearl McKee Barr, who died August 30, 2016. He is survived by his sons, Thomas Ramsey Barr and his wife Liz; Robert Patrick Barr and his wife Liz; his daughter, Rebecca Barr Knight and her husband, Marvin Pope; and his daughter-in-law, Gayle Barr. He is also survived by eleven grandchildren: Ashley, Christopher, Taylor, Thomas, Jamie, Carrie, Karl, Tim, Jessie, Ryan and Morgan; and three great-granddaughters, McKenzie, Emily and Juniper.

At 17, Tom skipped his senior year of high school to enroll in the University of Florida and enlisted as a Private in the Air Corps Enlisted Reserve. He was insulted when the Recruiting Officer said "Let's swear this kid in" – after all he was a man going to defend our country! He was called to active duty on June 8, 1943 and completed Basic Training as an aviation student. Tom and his friend, Charles Anderson, received their pilot's wings and commission as a 2nd Lieutenant on August 4, 1944. For 72 years, on the anniversary of getting

their wings, Col. Anderson and Col. Barr were in a race to see who could call the other one first on August 4th to commemorate that day. They were both selected for B-17 training (The Flying Fortress), both became pilots and they remained friends for life. The last call was August 4, 2016.

On December 6, 1944, Tom was assigned his flight crew and they served together until the end of WWII. They took the troop train from Lincoln, Nebraska to New York City and boarded the Queen Mary with 20,000 other soldiers headed to England. On March 27, 1945, they arrived at the 303rd Bomb Group (Hell's Angels) at Molesworth to serve in the 427th Bomb Squadron. Lt. Barr, only 19 years old, flew 11 bombing missions in 19 days taking out German airfields, railroad marshalling yards, weapons factories and concrete aircraft hangers hiding German fighter planes. The final mission involved more than 300 B-17 aircraft on a raid to bomb the Skoda armament works and airfield in Pilsen, Czechoslovakia.

The Colonel retired from the U. S. Air Force in 1974. During his career he flew a total of 5,225 hours: 104 combat hours in the WWII B-17 and 198 combat hours in Vietnam. He earned the American Campaign Medal; the Air Medal; the European, Africa, Middle East Campaign Medal with Battle Star Central European Campaign; the World War II Victory Medal; the Army of Occupation Medal; the National Defense Medal; the Air Force Commendation Medal; the Vietnam Service Metal with Battle Star; the Vietnam Campaign Medal; and a second Air Medal. The Air Force Commendation Medal was in recognition for his "dogged determination, confidence and conviction in the soundness of his logic" to develop new management policies and procedures "with tireless efforts and complete disregard for normal duty hours". He used his exhaustive research to convince the Chief of Staff to implement new practices for the entire Air Force resulting in a \$12,105,500 annual savings to the military in 1965 dollars or more than \$91 million in today's dollar. The Colonel was selected to receive the Department of Defense Cost Reduction Award from

the President but ironically it was determined he was ineligible because he was a member of the Defense Department. He was also proud to be named an honorary pilot in the Royal Hellenic Air Force in Athens for his service as an advisor to the Greek Air Force.

During the Korean War, Tom was stateside as a flight instructor. He loved to tell he taught Eddie Rickenbacker how to fly – but it was Eddie, Jr., the son of the most decorated WWI flying ace. In India in 1948, he and another officer had breakfast with Charles Lindberg who he described as a most humble man. Although he met many famous people and served under great leaders, the people he admired the most during his service were those under his command. He was a leader, mentor, friend and father figure to young people around the world.

After retiring from the Air Force, the Colonel and Peggy moved to Wolf Laurel in Madison County to be close to Peggy's mother in Walnut. Tom became the manager of the Wolf Laurel Ski Area and within three years increased the number of skiers from 3,000 to 25,000 per year. Peggy ran the ski shop and they had great fun working with each other and so many wonderful friends over the next eight years. Tom served as President of the Southeastern Ski Area Association serving 21 ski areas and was very dedicated to skier safety. After he retired from the ski business, he was the Operations Manager of his son's company, Hydrologic, Inc., in Asheville for many years. Again, he made many friends across the state and was a firm but kind leader. He never stopped trying to make things work better and a few weeks ago was he was still problem solving with the organization of the kitchen cabinets in his daughter's kitchen.

Tom was also very active in scouting and was an Eagle Scout, a Scoutmaster, and the proud father and grandfather of three Eagle Scouts. He led Scout

Camps at Camp Daniel Boone, in Spain and on the Isle of Corinth in Greece. He believed the lessons he learned in scouting guided him throughout his life and always encouraged young Scouts to achieve the Eagle Award.

The Colonel lived in the present and was always planning the next trip. He traveled around the world active duty and retired – there are very few places he had not been. The last accomplishment on his bucket list was to fly over the South Pole! Tom had a brilliant mind and was a walking history book. He earned a Master's Degree from the University of Maryland that was awarded to him by the Governor of Maryland when he was stationed in Germany. He loved to read and in the week before his stroke he read two books and was working on a third - his normal reading pace. He read the Wall Street Journal, the New York Times, a local paper daily and several news magazines cover to cover weekly. He cared deeply about his family, his country and the world. He had a strong, quiet faith with a predominate Methodist background. His grandmother was a Quaker Minister and he fondly remembers she took him to the World's Fair in Chicago in 1933.

In addition to the tragic loss of his son and his wife, the Colonel had two special events in the past year. In December 2015, he was honored by the Brown Foreman Company at a special ceremony at the National World War II Air Museum in Colorado Springs, Colorado. In WWII, he and his crew named their B-17 plane "Southern Comfort" hoping to get a case sent to them overseas. The war ended before they could get the letter sent and so for his 90th Birthday, his family sent a letter to the President of Brown Forman asking them to send him a bottle of Southern Comfort with a letter thanking him for his service. Instead they arranged a wonderful ceremony and presented him many gifts including a beautiful leather flight jacket, framed photos of him and his crew, a model B-17 and two cases of Southern Comfort specially selected for Col. Thomas Barr. He received national news coverage (google Col. Thomas Barr Southern Comfort) on many major networks. He did not feel worthy of the recognition but graciously accepted it on behalf of his crew and

all veterans of WWII.

The second event was to be a member of the 500th Honor Flight to Washington, DC in September for veterans of WWII, Korea & Vietnam. He had been stationed in Washington four times in his career and had visited the war memorials many times but was unprepared for the outpouring of appreciation and respect he and the other veterans received from the Honor Air Team, school children, strangers, family and friends, and especially Senator Bob Dole. The Colonel was overwhelmed with cards, gifts, hugs, bands, dancers and military personnel. He said it was the most wonderful trip of his life. A salute to Jeff Miller and the entire Honor Flight organization. The family would like to thank the Hospice staff of the Community Living Center at the Veterans Hospital in Asheville for the gentle and respectful way they cared for the Colonel and the family during his final days. God bless each of you and the veterans you serve.

“The Colonel”, as he was affectionally called by his family and friends, was an officer and a gentleman. He was our hero, our friend, our mentor, our cheerleader, our storyteller & comedian, our rock and strength – a force that will never be replaced but will always be with us. The Colonel will be buried with full military honors in Arlington National Cemetery where his wife, Peggy, is buried.

# Cemetery Details

## **Arlington National Cemetery**

Arlington, VA 22211

<http://www.arlingtoncemetery.mil/>

# Tribute Wall



“ *Col. Thomas J. Barr (US Air Force, Ret.)*

October 07, 2023 at 11:15 AM



“ *I am so sorry for the loss of your loved one. There is a very comforting scripture at Isaiah 25:8. It says that soon Jehovah will swallow up death forever and that he will wipe away all of the tears. So we can all look forward to a time when death will be no more. I hope that this scripture can bring some true comfort during these difficult times.*

**kayla** - December 21, 2016 at 12:29 PM



*In 1970 I had the pleasure and Honor of serving with Colonel Barr at Tuy Hoa Air Base RVN. what a great man he was. I was just sitting here , 49 years later, and he came to mine. I am so sorry for your loss.*

**Tom Shantz** - September 15, 2019 at 07:25 PM



“ *So sorry to read about the loss of Col. Barr. I always had great respect for him. The Col. and my old partner Dr. Shattuck took their flight training one week apart at the the same place .They too had a special friendship and camaraderie. The world is a better place due to men like Col. Barr. It was an honor to have known him.*

*Paul Michalove*

**Paul Michalove** - November 17, 2016 at 09:54 AM

PK

“ *Bob and Liz*

*We are very sorry at the passing away of your dad, Colonel Thomas Barr.*

*We want to thank him for serving our country so admirably. We are thinking of you at this time.*

*Percy & Kanthi Kahaduwe*

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**Percy Kahaduwe** - November 13, 2016 at 09:29 PM

JK

“ *Bob, Liz, Ryan and Morgan,*  
*We were so saddened to hear of the passing of your father and grandfather. His obituary in today's paper was beautiful and inspiring. He was quite a man! Please know our thoughts and prayers are with you and your family at this time.*  
*John and Kim Kennedy*

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**John Kennedy** - November 13, 2016 at 11:11 AM

JO

“ *I am deeply sorry for your loss of Col. Barr. The loss of a loved one is a difficult thing to deal with. Even though losing a loved one is quite hard to handle, we can find comfort in God's Word, the Bible. By fully relying on God and remaining close to him, we can endure any trial that may befall us. (Philippians 4:6) Your family is in my thoughts and prayers.*

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**Jonathan** - November 09, 2016 at 06:46 PM