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Former Clayton Mayor Richard T. Stith Jr. Dies

Memorial celebrating his life is Feb. 23 at St. Francis Xavier Church

February 13, 2013

Richard ("Dick") T. Stith Jr., a former mayor of Clayton, a leader of numerous area civic enterprises, and a much-decorated World War II Marine Corps pilot in the Pacific Theater, died Sunday, Feb. 10, 2013, after a short illness. He was 93 years old. The cause of death was complications from recently-diagnosed lung cancer, according to his family.

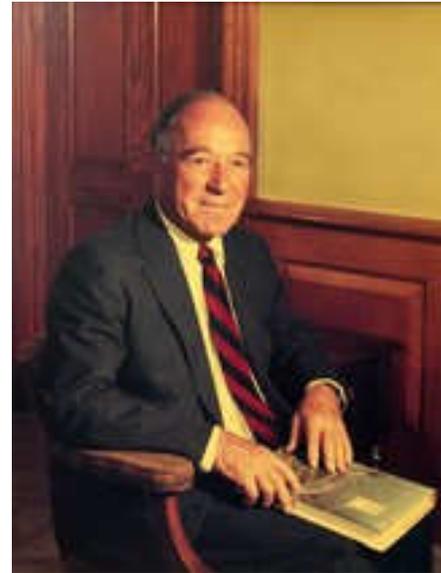
Mr. Stith graduated from Saint Louis University magna cum laude in 1940. His studies at Washington University Law School were interrupted by the outbreak of the war after completion of his first year. He joined the Navy in 1941 and was admitted into the newly-organized air arm of the Marine Corps as part of the 1st Marine Division. That division would win the Presidential Unit Citation for "extraordinary heroism" under "extremely difficult and hazardous conditions" in the battle for the Solomon Islands from September to November 1942.

Mr. Stith piloted air transport planes under heavy enemy fire to deliver emergency supplies and equipment for troops and to evacuate the wounded at Guadalcanal and other sites in the Solomon Islands. In the words of his November 1942 Distinguished Flying Cross citation, "despite these conditions, Lieut. Stith successfully accomplished each mission with a plane which had no defensive armament." He was cited for "outstanding heroism," "extraordinary achievement," and "exceptional skill, courage and devotion to duty."

By the time he emerged from the Marine Corps as a major in 1945, Mr. Stith, who continued to command only unarmed transport planes, had been awarded two more Distinguished Flying Crosses (three total) and 12 Air Medals.

Mr. Stith married his wife, Ann Carter (née See) Stith, in 1943. After the war, Mr. Stith and his late brother-in-law, F. Russell Fette, a Navy veteran, formed an insurance and financial planning agency which they maintained for several decades, first in St. Louis and then in Clayton, as general agents for New England Mutual Life Insurance Company (later merged with MetLife). A decade ago, Mr. Stith moved the office to his home in St. Louis, from which he continued to work until shortly before his death.

Mr. Stith also undertook a wide variety of public service activities in government, education and the nonprofit sector. He was elected to several terms on Clayton's six-member Board of Aldermen over a 10-year period (1972-1983), and then was twice elected mayor (1983 to 1987), during which time he also served as president of the Mayors of Large Cities of St. Louis County. Mr. Stith continued to play a role in Clayton government by serving six years as a member of Clayton's Plan Commission and Architectural Review Board. He was also a former commissioner of the St. Louis County Port Authority and vice-chairman of the St. Louis County Charter Revision Commission.



Mr. Stith



Mr. Stith, a World War II veteran, was a member of the Marine Corps.

Mr. Stith served his alma mater, Saint Louis University, in many capacities for decades, including as a member and chairman of the President's Council and as general chairman of its Alumni Fund Drive, and remained a member of the university's DuBourg Society until his death. He also was a prominent Roman Catholic layman in the years following the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) and organized various assemblies and programs in support of reforms encouraged by the Council.

Beginning in the 1970s, Mr. Stith served as a member and officer of several civic organizations, including the St. Louis Chapter of the United Nations Association, the Public Question Club of St. Louis, and Confluence St. Louis (now Focus St. Louis). In keeping with Mr. Stith's lifelong interest in helping those with mental illness, he served many years as a board member and president of the St. Louis Psychoanalytic Institute and, more recently, as a charter board member of Independence Center, which assists adults in the St. Louis area with serious mental illnesses to live and work independently.

An accomplished athlete at St. Louis University High School, Mr. Stith later became a superb and avid tennis player and golfer (and played his last nine holes in December 2012). He was also an enthusiastic canoeist, having honed his skills at Northway Lodge in Ontario, Canada, as a teenager. As an adult he led many float trips on Missouri's Current, Black and other Ozark rivers, as well as rafting expeditions on the Snake River in Idaho and the Green River in Utah.

After their children were grown, Dick and Ann Carter Stith traveled extensively throughout the world, often on small watercraft, from Malta and Djibouti to Odessa and the Amazon River; after Ann Carter's death in 2005, Mr. Stith traveled to Italy and annually to Mexico. Until his illness in January 2013, he was an active member of the Old Warson Country Club, the Missouri Athletic Club, the Lifelong Learning Institute at Washington University, and the Women's Democratic Forum.

Richard Taylor Stith Jr. was born in St. Louis on Oct. 31, 1919, to Agnes (néé Denvir) Stith and Richard Taylor Stith. In addition to his wife, Mr. Stith was predeceased in death by his son Frankie in 1949, his daughter Carter Stith Spano in 1979, and his siblings Miriam, Denvir (a Marine fighter pilot in the Pacific Theater) and Francis.

He is survived by his best friend and close companion Marie Tramelli Morrison of St. Louis, the widow of George H. Morrison, and by four children: Richard, a professor of law at Valparaiso University in Indiana; Kate Stith-Cabranes, a professor of law at Yale University in New Haven, Conn.; Laura Denvir Stith of Kansas City, a judge (and former chief justice) of the Supreme Court of Missouri; and Rebecca S. Stith, a senior trial attorney with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission in Seattle, Wash.

He also leaves 10 grandchildren and one great-granddaughter, as well as two "adopted" sons originally from Asia, each of whom became de facto members of the Stith family while attending Washington University and later became American citizens: Mohan Phansalkar, a native of India and now a lawyer in Newport Beach, Calif., and Yabo Lin, a native of China and now a lawyer in Palo Alto, Calif.

He is survived in addition by nieces Mary-Janet (Stith) Casserly, Cordelia Campbell (Fette) Mock and Susan Stith; by nephews J.D. Stith and F. Randolph Fette, and by many cousins, including Frederick ("Fritz") Stith (a City of St. Louis police officer) and Ann Stith de las Pozas.

A memorial celebrating Richard Stith's life will be held at Saint Louis University, St. Francis Xavier Church, 3628 Lindell Blvd., on Saturday, Feb. 23, at 2:30 p.m. The family requests that, in lieu of flowers, donations be directed to Independence Center, 4245 Forest Park Ave., St. Louis, Mo. 63108; or to the Presidential Scholar program at Saint Louis University, 221 N. Grand Blvd., St. Louis, Mo. 63103.