



## Captain Marvin "Jack" Gilford Smith Jr

April 13, 1923 - January 12, 2023

Captain Marvin "Jack" Gilford Smith, Jr., 99, resident of Prattville, AL, passed away peacefully on Thursday, January 12, 2023, at his home. He was a veteran who served in the United States Navy for 38 years including during WWII, the Korean War and the Vietnam War. Smith received the Bronze Star Medal with Combat "V", Joint Service Commendation Medal, and Medal of Honor, First Class, Republic of Vietnam.

Smith was born on April 13, 1923, to his parents, Marvin G. Smith, Sr. and Bobbie B. Smith, in Indianapolis, IN. He was reared in Kentucky and graduated from Livingston County High School at the age of 16. After living for awhile with his aunt in Indianapolis, he pleaded with his father to sign his papers for his joining the Navy. At 17 years of age in January 1941, he volunteered and entered the Navy as a "Minority Cruise" recruit for men ages 17-21, and he completed Naval boot camp in Great Lakes, IL. He then attended a technical school in Dearborn, MI, followed by service at Cape May, NJ, Travis City, MI, Eagle Mt., TX and Clinton, OK, working on guidance systems for pilotless aircraft.

After WWII ended, Smith was assigned to the Naval Air Station at Pensacola, FL, where he served as the Crew Chief for admiral Frank Wagner, the head of Naval Aviation training. During the Cold War, he served on Naval cruisers and the battleship, the USS Missouri, in the Mediterranean Sea and the Caribbean Sea. His next tour of duty was at the Naval Air Station at Anacostia, D.C., which also involved his completion of two years of an engineering degree at

George Washington University. Smith was accepted into officers training and was commissioned with the rank of Ensign in 1955. After completing three years of sea duty, he received his B.S. Degree in Naval Engineering from the Navy Post Graduate School in Monterey, CA.

Smith had a distinguished career as a Navy officer both on ship and shore. He served as the Communications Officer and the Operations Officer on the Allen M. Sumner (DD692), Executive Officer on the Vital (MSO-474), Executive Officer on the Valor (MSO-472), Operations Office on the USS Dahlgren (DLG-12) and Commanding Officer on the USS O'Callahan (DE-1051). He served two tours in Vietnam, graduated from the War College at Maxwell AFB, served with the Organization of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, served as commander of one of three teams each having 40 men with the Fleet Introduction Team Spruance Class destroyers in Pascagoula, MS, served as NROTC commander at the University of MS, for two years, retiring from military service in 1979. After retirement from military service, he worked as plant manager for the Polyquip Co. at St. Joseph, TN. His last employment of 20 years as Director of International Business Development for Von Gal Manufacturing Co. which made automatic material handling systems equipment at Montgomery, AL, retiring in 2000.

He was married to Joan Merriam Smith for three years; however, she did not survive the crash of an airplane that had a folded wing that she was piloting. Joan was a highly skilled aviatrix who completed the same route attempted by Amelia Earhardt. She was the first person to fly solo around the world at the equator, and a twin-engine plane around the world. In 1964, Joan was posthumously awarded the Harmon Trophy, one of three international trophies awarded to the world's outstanding aviator, aviatrix and aeronaut. Her biography describing her piloting skills and records are recorded in the recently published book, Fate on a Folding Wing by Tiffany Brown.

Smith was married to Martha Ann Slade Smith on June 16, 1967, for over 52 years. They had one son, Kevin Gaines Smith of Memphis, TN.; one daughter, Karen Ann Smith (Gil) of Barcelona, Spain; four grandchildren, Dawn Powers

of Washington, Dylan Slade Garcia and Anna Camille Garcia of Barcelona, Spain, and Gaines Gilford Smith of Memphis, TN. Smith is also survived his sister, Henrietta Dickerson of Wisconsin; a host of nieces and nephews in the US, and abroad. Smith was an active member of First United Methodist Church, Prattville, AL. Funeral services will be held on Tuesday, January 17, 2023, from First United Methodist Church at 2:00 pm with Dr. Tony McCullough officiating. Burial will follow at Prattville Memorial Mausoleum with Prattville Memorial directing and the folding of his flag in honor of his military service. The family will receive friends at the church on Tuesday from 1:00 pm until 2:00 pm. In lieu of flowers, memorials may be made in his honor to First United Methodist Church or Habitat for Humanity, 431 W. 4th Street, Prattville, AL, 36067. Pallbearers will be Matt Lewis, Andy Southern, Tom Rischer, Gordon Hallmark, Trey Salatto and Ron Ramon. Honorary Pallbearers will be Dylan Garcia Smith, Gaines Gillford Smith, Pat Benton, Glenn Kanal, Don Carrol, Pete O'Day, Benny Jackson, Mike Hargis, Mark Hargis, Winfred Slade, Kent Slade, Brent Slade, Gaines Slade, Bowen Slade, Field Slade, Brad Smith, Todd Smith, Lester Ray Smith, Anthony Smith, David Allen Smith and Boyce Jonathan Smith.

# Cemetery Details

## Prattville Memory Gardens

841 Fairview Avenue  
Prattville, AL

# Previous Events

## Visitation

JAN 17. 1:00 PM - 2:00 PM (CT)

First United Methodist Prattville  
100 E. 4th St.  
Prattville, AL

## Service

JAN 17. 2:00 PM (CT)

First United Methodist Prattville  
100 E. 4th St.  
Prattville, AL

# Tribute Wall



“ He was a gentleman, well dressed, drove great cars, loved his family, loved God and God's people. He could listen to you and hear you. He was a true servant to humanity. He was all inspiring to me!

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**Rebekah Smith Hillerman** - January 20, 2023 at 11:27 PM



“ *"Sending You an Angel" Statue to Express Sympathy for Funeral Or Memorial was purchased for the family of Captain Marvin "Jack" Gilford Smith Jr.*



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January 20, 2023 at 04:08 PM

KT

“ Our love and condolences from our family to the extensive family of Jack and Martha Smith. That's how we knew them in the 80's. Our son, Stephen, found a best friend in Kevin that decade. We later developed the friendship more when we would spend a long weekend with our snowbird friends Barb and Jerry Wilson, when they came south for a month or two in the winter. We learned more about them then. I had always had a pact with Martha that if she wouldn't call me after nine at night, I wouldn't call her before nine in the morning. Such little things we learned--about Martha's makeup and its importance, Jack's knack for storytelling...but the obituary knocked my socks off.

Martha, we knew, was Jack's second wife. She told us how they met when she was a stewardess on a plane. Perhaps my dearly belated Tommy knew; often the "boys" walked separate ways while the girls went shopping. I'm certain that all three had a lot of story-telling to tell. Jack and I were the early risers: usually I would fill the coffee pot each night but Jack would have it brewed before I got to the kitchen. His first cup he spent with the Bible and some devotional material. The Wilsons liked sleeping with windows open, so we'd sit on the deck in the sunshine with our coffee, the water sometimes as still as a pond, only a lone fisherman or two on the sand...friends. Martha was Jack's driver for these beach-soaked years. How I wish I had asked more questions about these two brave and adventurous wives. But Jack was such a gentleman, he probably chose not to say anything.

I wonder what good food Martha will prepare for the party for Jack, Stephen, and Tommy's homecoming. Much love to you, especially Kevin and Karen.

Kathleen Thompson and Teresa Thompson Renda

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**Kathleen Thompson** - January 18, 2023 at 12:53 PM

“ From the USS O'Callahan (DE/FF1051) - Known by radio call sign as "IRISH SONG" . Capt. Jack was our C.O. for 1971-72. He took command in Vietnam and brought her back to San Diego. He was in command until about mid 1972, taking the ship through an intensive refit to be the first platform for the LAMPS HS2D Helicopter. The helo and its crew were a huge asset to our ship on the next Vietnam deployment.

Today - every destroyer and frigate has one or two helicopters aboard along with the crews to operate them. IT was a huge task and Jack took to it like a duck to water. He already had a full career in the Navy and knew the ropes. The shipyard master was a good friend from former assignments. The two found ways to boost our budget to get completed faster and with more assets by "annexing" some budgetary items from other much larger ships in the yards at the same time. O'Callahan came out of the yards in record time. Yardwork was a notorious time drag for most ships at that time in US Shipyards.

I arrived in October of 1971 in San Diego. It was just back from Vietnam. The ship was preparing for the yard visit (see above). I was a very green Ensign and was put in charge of the communications division. I had a lot to learn - mainly how to not mess up and get imprisoned in the Portsmouth Naval Prison for mishandling classified materials.

Capt. Jack was the rank of Commander then - the rank normally assigned to captain a ship of that size. To a green Navy Ensign - he was intimidating at first. The great respect he commanded, came from his nature of leading through a nature of a guide and teacher. Young officers were brought in for discussions on occasion. The respect grew and he built a wardroom he could trust. His demeanor with the enlisted sailors was no different. Everyone got respect from him and it was returned. When discipline was needed , it was addressed fairly. So the respect was key to his ability to command with strong response. When he commanded - loyalty and respect

*assured the task would be done well and soon.*

*Capt. Jack was in early years of marriage with Martha. They had at least one child at home then. Martha and Capt. Jack had at least one dinner at their home with the young officers. And Martha visited the ship a few times. My bride of December 1971 was able to meet her and Jack and enjoy the gracious hospitality at their home. Since Martha was from Alabama and we were from a bordering state, the accents were "home". These warm memories of gracious hosts in a far away town are still fresh.*

*In the last 20 years an association of "IRISH SONG" was formed and reunions held. Capt. Jack attended several. His life story was told to us by a video recording that is on youtube. He had more than his share of hard experiences in life. But he was one to go forward - forward always. So, in his family years - he was blessed and became one of the more compassionate and gracious people you might ever meet.*

*We sailors of the USS O'Callahan who were under his leadership count it as some of the most important years of our lives in personal development. We salute our Captain and pray for fair winds and following seas.*

*A link to [ussocallahan dot org](http://ussocallahan.org) will offer more insight.*



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**Vic Campbell** - January 17, 2023 at 10:18 AM



*I was a Machinist Mate when Captain Smith took command. I remember him as a very friendly person...not shy to mingle with his crew at any time. He was respected by all on 1051. His decisions and directives kept O'Callahan 1051 safe and secure. A leader and gentleman was his forte. He demonstrated what he learned...what he believed...and instilled in all of us what a decent Naval Officer was all about. I thank him for his dedicated service to our Nation...and to the crew of O'Callahan that appreciated his leadership and integrity. Rest in Peace Sir...job and faithfulness well done.  
Michael. Hamilton..MM2  
1969...1973.*

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**Michael Hamilton** - January 17, 2023 at 01:27 PM

BW

“ *Shared many a good story during breakfast on Thursday mornings in Prattville. An honor to know him and listen to his life. Appreciate all the time we got the pray together. God bless his family and dear friends.*

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**Bro' Joel Wasson** - January 14, 2023 at 11:24 PM

LT

“ *Our sincere condolences to the family! Jack has been a long time friend! In fact my Father worked on Joan her airplane when she was on her around the world flight! She had a stop over in Suriname, So America (Dutch Guyana at that time)! The airplane had some mechanical issues and my Dad was the only qualified person to do the job! I ended up becoming a stewardess for Pan Am and eventually ended up flying into Viet Nam when Jack was stationed there! He met our airplane and arranged transportation for us to visit downtown Saigon! Here we were driving around town in military jeeps in our uniform! We were all grateful for his kindness! We stayed in touch all these years and as I am sure he will will be missed by his family and all hid friends! God speed my friend!*



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**Lynn and Bill Turner** - January 14, 2023 at 06:57 PM