

A TRIBUTE – WELL DESERVED

By Bobbie Sue Shelton-Lonas

The following tribute, written by Kevin Youse of Murfreesboro appeared in the January 2008 Rutherford Reader. Pete Tucker who knew Mr. Sam Smithson, the subject of the writing, brought it to my attention. With permission from Mr. Youse, we are sharing this wonderful tribute, with you who have not read it previously. After reading it and talking with Mr. Youse, I visited with Mr. Sam's brother, Dorris, (Put), as he's more commonly known and his wife, Margaret. He recounted to me that his parents, P. H. and Mattie Smithson were parents of twelve children and four of their sons served in the army during World War II at the same time. Sam and Dorris in Germany, Ed in Honolulu, Hawaii and Roy in California. Sam was the only one of them who was taken as a prisoner of war. To even make matters worse for the family, Mr. P. H. Smithson, died within a week of Sam's capture by the Germans. While being held captive, the news of his father's death was censored in letters and he didn't know of his father's death until he returned home.

There are only four siblings of Mr. Sam's still living; Roy, Dorris (Put) and two sisters, Jimmie and Rebecca.

TENNESSEE HERO WILL BE MISSED

By Kevin Youse

Tennessee is known as the volunteer state and well it should be. Men and women from this great state have volunteered and fought for America with pride. Last week a 95-year-old World War II Hero passed off the scene virtually unnoticed. I had the privilege of meeting Mr. Sam as we affectionately called him in 2004. He was a small framed man who quietly lived his life in Bethesda, TN. No one would ever look at him and guess he had this story to tell. I hope I get the details correct because he deserves our attention.

Sam C. Smithson was born October 4, 1912 in Williamson County Tennessee. He was raised in rural Tennessee and as such never lost the attributes of his fine "salt of the earth" family. He was unassuming by nature and never drew attention to himself. He married his sweetheart Fronie Culberson. At 81, I could still tell there was a love relationship between the two of them. She was proud of her man and he adored her.

When World War II broke out, Sam was 30 years old. He could not be inducted because he could not read. He disregarded his safety and enlisted. It was told to me this way. He would not remain safe while others went off to war. This is reminiscent of that period. Very few men were draft dodgers at this time. Mr. Sam took great satisfaction in knowing that what he was doing



Sam Smithson

was noble and right.

He was inducted to the US Army December 17, 1942. He was assigned to and served in the 612th Tank Destroyer Battalion Company B. He saw action and fought in five major battles in Normandy, Northern France, the Rhineland and the Ardennes. During the Battle of the Bulge and the march into Germany, these tankers served in some of the most miserable of conditions. Extreme weather, unbelievable snow and cold stymied them. Slowly they trudged and fought their way into the belly of the Nazi strong holds. His

battalion received a

commendation for their outstanding performance during the Battle of the Bulge.

On December 17, 1944 exactly two years after his induction, Mr. Sam was taken prisoner by the Germans. He was held in Stalag 13c, a POW camp in Hammelburg Bavaria. These camps were stark. It was near the end of the war and the Nazi's were short on supplies. Little wasted on prisoners in the stalags. Here in harsh lonely conditions, Mr. Sam endured and survived. He was liberated on April 28, 1945.

After his discharge, he returned to Bethesda and continued his married life of 69 years to Miss Fronie. He did not seek honor and rarely if ever mentioned his days of war. Through a series of circumstances and meetings with family members and friends, it was discovered that Mr. Sam had never received his medals for being a prisoner of war. A friend in the community brought this to the attention of a member of Rolling Thunder Chapter One of Tennessee. Pat brought this to the chapter's attention and she worked diligently to correct this oversight.

Mr. Sam was made a lifetime member of Rolling Thunder* Chapter One at a 2004 Veteran's Day program in the Bethesda Community. He was so proud

of all those "young boys" caring for him. He proudly flew his American and POW-MIA flags at his home. At age 95, he was the oldest known surviving ex-POW in the state of Tennessee. I looked for a mention of his heroes passing and sadly only found a few lines in the Tennessean. Our children need heroes. Mr. Sam was the kind of man I want to emulate and want my son and

grandson to be. Mr. Sam Thank you for serving your country. I am thankful I met you and we at Rolling Thunder will never forget you.

He was preceded in death by wife, Fronie Culberson Smithson. Survived by son, Sam C. (Jo Ann) Smithson Jr.; granddaughter, Amber Smithson, great grandson, Jayden Pruitt; brothers, Roy "Duke" Smithson & Dorris "Putt" Smithson; sisters, Jimmie Brown Robertson & Rebecca Haskins. Services were conducted 11 a.m. Saturday, January 19, 2008 at Williamson Memorial Funeral Home.

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The Rolling Thunder Organization, mentioned above article written by Mr. Youse was incorporated in 1995. Rolling Thunder, Inc. is a class 501 C-4 non-profit organization with over 80-chartered chapters throughout the United States and members abroad. The membership is comprised of men and woman with 40-45% being non-veterans with the remaining being veterans from all wars and peacetime. Although many of its members ride motorcycles, a person does not have to own or ride a motorcycle to be a member, just the time and willingness to be an advocate for our troops, veterans and POW/MIA's. Each year, Rolling Thunder National spends hundreds of thousands of dollars in financial support, food, clothing and other essentials to sanctioned veteran's groups, veterans and their families in need, homeless veteran programs, women's crisis centers and toys for children. The state chapters also spend hundreds of thousands of dollars each year on issues and veterans. No officer and/or member of Rolling Thunder, Inc. and/or charities receive compensation for their time and efforts; all donated. Thank you, Mr. Youse for permission to use your tribute and also for all the help, respect and recognition the Rolling Thunder Chapter One provided for Mr. Sam and his family.



Dorris "Put" Smithson