



## **Lt. Col. Ellis R. Smith USAF Ret.**

January 11, 1926 - April 4, 2019

Ellis Rountree Smith passed away April 4, 2019 at his home in Tallahassee. He was born in Tallahassee on January 11, 1926 into a North Florida pioneer family. He was the only child of the late Frederick Choice Smith and Lena Rountree Smith. Ellis grew up on the family farm and developed a strong work ethic at an early age. He worked at his family's country store and grist mill, picked cotton, plowed with mules, picked and hung tobacco, and tended hogs and chickens, among other farm activities.

When he moved into town in his early teens, Ellis delivered the Tallahassee Morning News and—in the afternoon—the Tallahassee Democrat by bicycle. He stocked shelves and carried groceries (before carts were used) for 10 cents an hour at the old Rogers Grocery Store downtown. He also ushered at the three downtown movie theaters. During this period, Ellis was an honors student at Leon High School. Upon graduation in 1943, during the height of World War II, he enlisted in the United States Navy at 17 years of age.

During the war, Ellis served as a flight engineer on a PBY Catalina Patrol Bomber, an amphibious aircraft. He and his crew flew submarine patrols and search and rescue missions along the South Atlantic shipping lanes. He was later transferred to Whidbey Island, Washington, where his plane patrolled the coastal area from the Aleutian Islands of Alaska to San Diego, California. He was honorably discharged from the Navy in 1947.

After the war, Ellis attended the Tallahassee Branch of the University of Florida at the Florida State College for Women, transferred to Georgia Tech to study industrial engineering, and eventually transferred back to FSU, where he majored in business with an emphasis in accounting. While at FSU, he married the girl next door, Sara Lou Stikelether, to whom he remained married for 68 years. He was the proud father of two sons, Philip and Graham, whom he loved, admired, and respected his entire life.

While in college, Ellis joined the first United States Air Force (USAF) ROTC program at FSU and was commissioned in May 1951. During the Korean War, he became a contract audit specialist for the USAF Auditor General. This specialty eventually took him throughout the US and to 28 countries, where the Air Force had contracts with numerous businesses and universities. While stationed in Alaska with his family, Ellis was instrumental in selecting radar sites for the DEW (Distant Early Warning) Line project during the Cold War. Subsequent assignments took them to Phoenix, Arizona and Frankfurt, Germany. While in Germany he worked with major industries and programs throughout Europe and the Middle East.

On his return to the US in 1963, he was stationed in Washington, D.C. and San Bernardino, California as a member of the Auditor General Inspection Team, traveling the world auditing international contractors and inspecting USAF base operations. His last assignment was at Albrook Air Force Base in the Panama Canal Zone, where he was Staff Command Liaison Auditor for the USAF South Central Command.

Upon his retirement as a lieutenant colonel in 1970, Ellis returned to Tallahassee and became the first Chief Internal Auditor for the newly reorganized Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles. At the same time, he began a cattle ranch and hay operation on the family farm in eastern

Leon County. Eventually, he converted the ranch into a planted pine and timber operation. He and Sara Lou were recognized as the North Florida Farm Family of the Year in 2000 and received the Florida Forestry Association's "Tree Farmer of the Year" award in 2011.

Ellis lived a wonderful, fulfilling life with his family at the center of all he did. He loved his God, his family, and his country dearly. He represented his World War II generation with pride, reflecting the great respect, integrity and honor with which he served his nation.

He is survived by his wife of 68 years; his sons Philip (Lynn) and Graham (Libby); his four grandchildren: Christina Ard (John), Sarah Bender (John), and Heather and Morgan Smith; and three great-grandchildren, Taylor and Chase Ard, and Rachael Bender.

A celebration of Ellis' life will be held at 2:00 p.m. on Friday, April 12, 2019, at the Lafayette Presbyterian Church, 4220 Mahan Drive, Tallahassee, Florida. A private family burial will be held at the Tallahassee National Cemetery on a date to be determined. In lieu of flowers, memorial contributions may be sent to Lafayette Presbyterian Church or to the Florida Sheriff's Youth Ranches – both places near and dear to him.

Kelly Barber of Bevis Funeral Home (850-385-2193 or [www.bevisfh.com](http://www.bevisfh.com)) is assisting the Smith family with their arrangements.

# Cemetery Details

## Tallahassee National Cemetery

5015 Apalachee Parkway  
Tallahassee, FL 32311

# Previous Events

## Memorial Service

APR 12. 2:00 PM (ET)

Lafayette Presbyterian Church  
4420 Mahan Dr.  
Tallahassee, FL

# Tribute Wall



“ *Simply Elegant Spathiphyllum was purchased for the family of Lt. Col. Ellis R. Smith USAF Ret. .*



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April 12, 2019 at 06:49 AM



“ *Simply Elegant Spathiphyllum was purchased for the family of Lt. Col. Ellis R. Smith USAF Ret. .*



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April 11, 2019 at 12:25 PM



“ *My sincere condolences go to Mrs. Smith, Phillip, Graham and the entire family of this great man. Mr. Smith hired me in 1977 as an Internal Auditor at the Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles. Although I worked for him for four short years, his guidance and mentoring during that time had a profound impact on my professional and personal life for which I will always be grateful. He was a role-model; exemplifying principles of honesty, respect, integrity, honor, and the importance of service to his country. I regret that I will be unable to attend the memorial service this Friday, but please know that my thoughts are with all of you and I pray that you will find comfort in knowing that he lived a wonderful life.*

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**Bob Romig** - April 11, 2019 at 10:02 AM

JG

“ *Jorge, Pamela and Jake Gonzalez purchased the Crystal Cross Bouquet for the family of Lt. Col. Ellis R. Smith USAF Ret. .*



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**Jorge, Pamela and Jake Gonzalez** - April 08, 2019 at 08:08 PM

DK

“ *To the family of Mr. Smith we send our sincere condolences. We pray that you are able to find peace in his wonderful memories. With much love, hugs and prayers--David and Phyllis Kirkland*

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**David and Phyllis Kirkland** - April 08, 2019 at 11:54 AM