

Lewis Thomas Easterling

January 20, 1924 - May 29, 2021

Lewis Thomas Easterling, 97, of Mint Hill, died May 29, 2021, at the Novant Presbyterian Health Center in Charlotte.

Tom was born in Ellerbe, NC, on January 20, 1924, the youngest of two daughters and four sons born to Robert and Daisy Mae Ballard Easterling. When the United States entered World War II and called on her sons and daughters to serve, Tom heard the call and joined the United States Army Air Corps as an Aviation Cadet on February 8, 1943 at Camp Croft, South Carolina. At 5 foot 9 inches tall, the brown eyed, black haired student with the ruddy complexion (as his enlistment record described him) showed an aptitude for being a pilot. On February 8, 1943, with his "Pilot Single Engine" qualification, 1st Lieutenant Easterling began his service in the European Theater. Training originally on the P-40 Warhawk in Tifton, Georgia, he transitioned to the "Jug", the Republic P-47 Thunderbolt, a medium fighter escort that doubled as a ground attack unit. As a Thunderbolt pilot, he participated in campaigns over Normandy, Northern France and Rhineland. Through his endeavors, he was awarded the Purple Heart twice, the European Theater Service Medal, Air Medal with 6 Oak Leaf Clusters, the World War II Victory Medal, the American Theater Service Medal, and the Presidential Unit Citation. He even received the French Croix De Guerre with Palm from the President of the Provisional French Government on November 14, 1945, for the distinguished service with his squadron and their magnificent record of never permitting the loss of an escorted bomber by an enemy plane.

As a member of the 358th Fighter Group, 365th Squadron, 9th Air Force in the European Theater of Operations, Lt. Easterling completed 68 combat missions in his 11 months overseas. On December 17, 1944, 2nd Lt. Easterling was flying a combat mission over Germany. After strafing an ammunition train, his plane was extensively damaged by the resulting explosion. Unable to see out the canopy from the engine oil covering it, he jettisoned his canopy and attempted to make it back to allied lines. Shortly thereafter, however, he ran into intense, heavy flak and began to lose altitude. Unable to control his plane any longer, he ejected from the crippled airframe a mere 300 feet above the ground.

While ejecting, he was severely injured when he was struck by the tail assembly of his plane which went on to crash into the ground and explode. He was further wounded by enemy ground fire as he descended to the ground. With a severely injured left leg that he went on to live with for the rest of his life, Lt. Easterling was taken prisoner of war by the Germans where he remained until liberated by French Forces on April 22, 1945. His four and one half months as a prisoner of the German Army further earned him the POW Medal and the gratitude of a grateful nation. His exploits are documented in the book "Furrow in the Clouds".

On November 26, 1947, Lt. Easterling was honorably discharged and returned to civilian life, where his aptitude with numbers led him to accounting. The rest of his working career was spent doing accounting for hospital administration, a slightly slower pace and safer occupation than piloting the P-47.

Tom enjoyed many things in life and was a proud member of both the Indian Trail VFW Post and Hickory Grove Baptist Church. Most of all, however, Tom loved the time spent with people, especially his children, and he will be both sadly missed and honorably remembered.

Tom is survived by his wife, Shirley, of Mint Hill; and his children: Nancy Ann Harrelson, John Harvey Easterling and Donald Eugene Easterling. He is further survived by 5 grandchildren, 11 great grandchildren, other numerous relatives, friends and a nation who owes him and all other veterans for their service. Tom was preceded in death by his parents; his two sisters; his three brothers; and the mother of his children, Leo Alma Wright Easterling whom he married shortly being after being discharged from the military.

Tom met with the family of Lowe-Neddo Funeral Home in advance of his passing and made all necessary arrangements to provide them the honor of caring for him when this day came. Lowe-Neddo Funeral Home is privileged to care for Tom and his family now.

Visitation will begin at 1 pm and services will begin at 2 pm on Wednesday, June 2, 2021. In honor of his church affiliation, the visitation and service will be held at Hickory Grove Baptist Church with Pastor John Harrill leading the celebration of his life. Interment will take place at Evergreen Cemetery following the church service. There, he will be laid in his final place of earthly rest with military honors.

Tom's wishes were for anyone wishing to honor him, to please do so by giving a donation in his name to Hickory Grove Baptist Church, the Charlotte Mission Center, or the American Red Cross.

Please take a moment to share a memory, photo or condolence with the family of Tom's
Tribute Wall.

Cemetery Details

Evergreen Cemetery

4426 Central Avenue
Charlotte, NC 28205

Previous Events

Visitation

JUN 2. 1:00 PM - 2:00 PM (ET)

Hickory Grove Baptist Church
6050 Hickory Grove Road
Charlotte, NC 28215
<http://www.hgbc.org>

Celebration of Life Service

JUN 2. 2:00 PM - 2:45 PM (ET)

Hickory Grove Baptist Church
6050 Hickory Grove Road
Charlotte, NC 28215
<http://www.hgbc.org>

Tribute Wall



“ *Lowe-Neddo Funeral Home created a Hickory Grove Funeral Service in memory of Lewis Thomas Easterling*



Lowe-Neddo Funeral Home - June 08, 2021 at 11:38 AM



“ *Lowe-Neddo Funeral Home created a Tribute Video in memory of Lewis Thomas Easterling*



Lowe-Neddo Funeral Home - June 08, 2021 at 11:35 AM



“ *Lewis Thomas Easterling*

October 05, 2023 at 07:26 AM



“ *Lewis Thomas Easterling*

October 24, 2022 at 08:52 PM

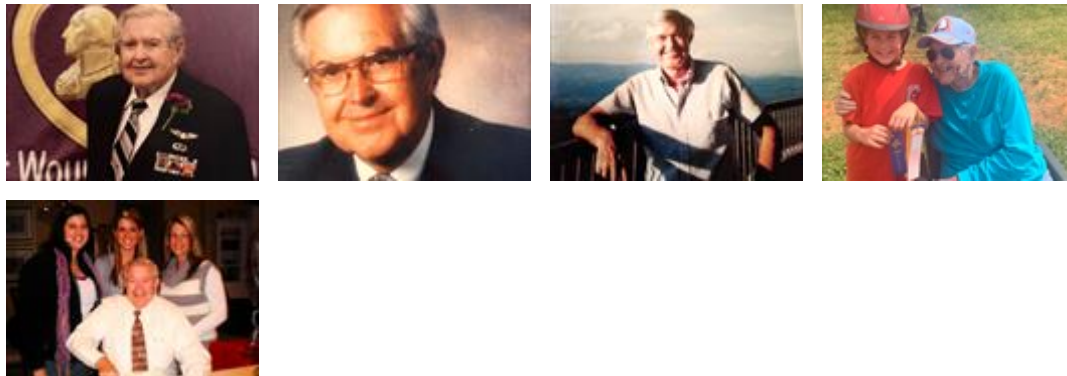
RL

“ I interviewed Tom many years ago, for the Mint Hill newspaper, and it was truly a pleasure to meet him. We kept in touch for a few years, until he became too weak, and I have always wondered how he was. Unfortunately, I have now found his obit, and am saddened by his loss. My condolences to his family. We have truly lost a wonderful hero. I lost my father on May 29, also, in 1989. He was in WWII in the Pacific arena, flying as a radar tech on a bomber. We owe these men so much. They fought for our freedoms, so I hope we can hold on to them, so their fight may not be in vain. Rest In Peace, Mr. Easterling.
Rustee Lane

Rustee Lane - August 14, 2021 at 03:58 PM



“ 65 files added to the album Memories Album



Lowe-Neddo Funeral Home - June 08, 2021 at 11:35 AM

VP

“ Mr. Tom Easterling fought and survived the war and raised a loving and Christian family. He is at peace with the Lord. Love and prayers for the Easterling family.



Virginia and Danny Pharr - June 02, 2021 at 09:48 PM



“ Full Of Love Bouquet was purchased for the family of Lewis Thomas Easterling.



June 02, 2021 at 06:41 AM



“ *Sentiments of Serenity Spray was purchased for the family of Lewis Thomas Easterling.*



June 02, 2021 at 06:31 AM

RB

“ *Tom has always been an inspiration, and following my military experience, a true role model. He beat the odds against longevity with honor, honesty and dignity.*

Robert Bryson - June 01, 2021 at 10:18 PM



“ *Peaceful White Lilies Basket was purchased for the family of Lewis Thomas Easterling.*



June 01, 2021 at 08:09 PM

TF

“ *The Ben May Family purchased the Divine Peace Bouquet for the family of Lewis Thomas Easterling.*



The Ben May Family - June 01, 2021 at 06:38 PM



“ *Emerald Garden Basket was purchased for the family of Lewis Thomas Easterling.*



June 01, 2021 at 08:50 AM