



Captain Willis Lewis "Slim" Somervell

June 3, 1924 - April 7, 2014

Captain Willis Lewis 'Slim' Somervell, Jr., US Navy, Retired, of Fort Collins, 89, died peacefully on April 7, 2014, with loving family at his bedside. His amazing life on earth is being celebrated by his family and in Heaven, greeted by his beloved wife, Mary. Slim was born June 3, 1924 in Marlin, Texas to Willis Lewis and Eloise Nickels Somervell, Sr. He graduated with honors from Lincoln HS in Tacoma, WA, and attended the University of Washington in Seattle where he began his 27 year naval career enrolling as a midshipman in the NROTC program in 1943. In 1944, Slim was commissioned an ensign in the US Naval Reserves and served in numerous amphibious assaults in the Navy's Pacific campaigns of 1944 and 1945 as Gunnery Officer on LCIs and LSTs and as Gunnery Officer, and later Commanding Officer of USS LSM-142. He participated in the combat landings on Kwajalein, Eniwetok, Guam, Tinian, Saipan, Leyte and Okinawa among others, and landed in Japan shortly after the surrender ceremonies in Tokyo Bay. After World War II he was Commanding Officer of the antisubmarine vessel USS PC-1262, Executive Officer of USS Havre PCEC-877 and Executive Officer of USS Coolbaugh DE-217. He graduated from the Naval Postgraduate School in 1949, receiving the Master of Science degree in meteorology, finishing at the head of his class. Slim witnessed six atomic energy tests at Eniwetok in 1951 and 1952, serving in JTF-3 for Operation Greenhouse and JTF-121 for Operation Ivy. Slim served as Staff Meteorologist to Commander Carrier Division FOUR aboard USS Intrepid CVA-11 in 1955-56 in the Mediterranean, carried out

research at Naval Facility McMurdo in Antarctica, and was Staff Meteorologist to Commander Carrier Division SIX aboard USS Forrestal CVA-59 in NATO exercises in the Atlantic and western Mediterranean in 1962-63. He was later Fleet Meteorologist to Commander SECOND Fleet on USS Northampton CC-1, a "floating White House" equipped for possible use by the President in the event of nuclear attack with the tallest communications mast in the Navy. He was the first officer to be assigned as Meteorological Liaison Officer in Europe to Commander Striking Fleet Atlantic, and was the first naval officer to serve as Geophysics Officer of the Pacific Missile Range in California. During the Vietnam Conflict, Slim was Fleet Meteorologist to Commander SEVENTH Fleet on the flagship USS Oklahoma City CLG-5 from 1964 to 1966, giving final weather clearance for airstrikes from Yankee Station in the Gulf of Tonkin. He was the first officer to serve more than one tour afloat as Fleet Meteorologist. Capt. Somervell was a distinguished naval officer from an old Southern military family, and a prominent military weather scientist, finishing his US Navy career at the rank of Captain as Commanding Officer of the Navy Weather Research Facility in Norfolk, VA. He was interested in tropical storms and authored scientific papers on the subject from 1957 to 1970 such as "The Prediction of Maritime Cyclones" and "Tropical Cyclone Evasion Planning." Other research interests included weather modification, aspects of oceanography related to antisubmarine warfare, and Arctic and Antarctic meteorology. He completed three tours of duty at the Navy Weather Research Facility in Norfolk, VA from the 1950s to 1970 and was the eighth Commanding Officer from 1966 to 1970, retiring after 27 years of military service. The family lived in Europe, Asia, and on both US coasts as part of Slim's assignments. Slim met Margaret Mary McCord in Monterey, California and married in Kerrville, TX on July 25, 1949. They received Apostolic Blessings from Pope Pius XII in 1952 and from Pope John Paul II in 1999 in honor of their 50th wedding anniversary. He lovingly referred to Mary as his 'bride', and greeted her entry into a room with 'here comes the pretty lady'. He was pre-deceased by Mary in 2012 after nearly 63 years of marriage. Upon

retirement, Slim and Mary moved to Colorado, where he worked at CSU as Department Manager, Associate Department Head, and Synoptic Weather Instructor of the Atmospheric Science Department and with ERG in the College of Engineering from 1971 – 1985. In 1972, Slim and Mary moved to Rist Canyon, living on 72 beautiful acres they affectionately called 'Blue Jay Hill'. Slim donned his Stetson and bolo while he worked on the property building snow fences and a pond, cutting hay, and raising cattle amongst their horses, chickens, ducks, rabbits, guinea hens, dogs and cats. Among Slim's numerous accomplishments and activities were his role as a founding member and Chief of the Rist Canyon Volunteer Fire Department, where he chaired the annual summer RCVFD Mountain Festival. He was co-founder of the Rocky Road Association in Rist Canyon, a member of the Executive Board of the Larimer County Republican Party, a member of the Republican State Leadership Committee, and a member and Past-President of the Retired Military Officers Association of America. Slim became a registered representative of New York Life Insurance, selling investments and insurance and a founding member and officer of the Green Machine Investment Club. From 1988 to 1994, he was a substitute school bus operator with Poudre School District R-1 because he believed in 'a purpose in one's life, some reason for getting up in the morning.' Slim and Mary were members of St. Joseph Catholic Church for 42 years where Slim served as a Eucharistic Minister and Lector. His baritone voice was heard singing in church choirs and in Mass. Slim loved playing cards, cribbage, and dominoes, building Heathkit electronics, singing to his children, initiating spelling contests at dinner table, reading likely all works of Louis L'Amour, country music, and travel with family in their RV, 'The Albatross'. Slim was such a character – he had THE best one-liners! He never compromised his beliefs. He was a proud man without being prideful. He was humble at heart. He was our hero and protector. He is now in Heaven with the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Angels and Saints, giving praise to the Holy Trinity. Slim and Mary hosted family reunions in Estes Park,

Durango and Keystone. Their later years were spent in their beautiful home at Adriel Hills. He is survived by his loving sister, Harriett Somervell Peters of Abingdon, Virginia; son, Willis Lewis "Bill" Somervell V of San Diego, California; four daughters: Cathy David Wilson of Fort Collins, Frances Johnson of Virginia Beach, Virginia, Maureen Somervell of Fort Collins, and Joann James Hards of Durango, Colorado; 13 grandchildren: Holly John Johnson, Mary Kathryn Wilson, Katherine Peter Leininger, Kevin Johnson, Christine Drew Cole, Willis Kristin Somervell VI, Joseph Somervell, Roger Somervell-Bath, Michael Kelsey Somervell, Joseph Somervell-Bath, Chadwick Hards, Heather Hards, and James Hards; three great-grandchildren: Jack Leininger, Ezekiel Somervell and Jax Johnson; nephew Michael Karen Edwards of Abingdon, Virginia; great-grandnephew Jake, and great-grandniece Monica. His four-legged friend is Ralphie. The Rosary will be recited at Bohlender Funeral Chapel on Sunday, April 13, 2014 at 4:00 p.m. A Mass of Christian Burial will be held at Saint Joseph Catholic Church on Monday, April 14, 2014 at 9:30 a.m. Interment with Military Honors will follow at Grandview Cemetery. Memorial contributions can be made to Saint Joseph Catholic Church in care of Bohlender Funeral Chapel, 121 W. Olive St., Ft. Collins, CO 80524.

Tribute Wall

CS

“ He was my great-grandfather, I never got to meet him... I was born a year after he passed 🥹 I hope he is having a good time in heaven.

Christian David Somervell - June 11, 2025 at 12:02 AM

SS

“ Fran and family - What a beautifully written and interesting obituary on your dad! He lived such a full life. You all must be very proud. For so many years I've heard Fran tell such great stories of your mom and dad. May you continue to tell those stories so that family and friends will always remember how special your parents were. My heart goes out to all of you. I love you, Fran! Shelley

Shelley Stiles - April 17, 2014 at 12:00 AM

GB

“ I am sorry for your loss. Thank you Captain Somervell for your service to our country.

Greg Brewster - April 16, 2014 at 12:00 AM

CB

“ A few years ago Slim & Mary would join for a monthly potluck here in Adriel Hills. Slim always had good things to say & my husband was a fellow Navy man. What a wonderful life! Our thoughts are with your family.

Cheryl & John Beckett - April 15, 2014 at 12:00 AM

MA

“ We wish to say Thank You to your loved one for his service to our great country. Our sympathies are with your family Marine Corps League Auxiliary #785 Fort Collins, CO

Marine Corps League Auxiliary - April 14, 2014 at 12:00 AM

JB

“ Oh, my, so many memories, going back to 1977 when Slim and Mary's son rented our old farm house near LaPorte. Then the St. Joseph years, when he was a lector. There were the cattle years when he bought heifers and a bull from my husband, Jim--cattle that seemed to want to roam the hills of Rist Canyon. Slim was an unforgettable character.

Jim and Rose Brinks - April 14, 2014 at 12:00 AM

BC

“ Slim was a great friend and "neighbor" to us in Rist Canyon, the RC Volunteer Fire Department, and the Atmospheric Science Department. We could always count on his good will and good humor. We'll always remember him and smile.

Bill and Vollie Cotton - April 14, 2014 at 12:00 AM