



Joseph Bernard Cassidy

June 24, 2020

Retired U.S. Army Colonel, Joseph Bernard Cassidy, 95, passed peacefully from natural causes at the stroke of midnight, June 24, 2020, following a period of general decline, with his daughter Mimi by his side.

Born on February 3, 1925, Joe and his triplet brothers were the youngest of nine children born to John Thomas and Susan Mary Josephine Cassidy in Boston, MA. Joe was the last surviving sibling in the family.

Joe's incredible sense of humor helped shape his outlook on life. One of his first insights into his unique and crowded childhood was often summed-up this way, "First one up, best one dressed."

Because triplets were so unusual in those days, Joe, Paul and Leo became known as the "Dorchester Triplets" and were sponsored by Hood Milk Company and the Mellon Food Corporation, appearing on various food cartons and promotional materials. Later, politically-active Susan "gigged" Joe out to deliver speeches prepared for him in support of various local candidates. Joe became known as "Boston's Boy Orator," a trait that served him well throughout his life. Anyone who had the pleasure of knowing Joe was aware that he had the gift of gab; this led to his interest in public speaking. An excellent researcher and presenter, Joe wrote and delivered lectures on varied topics, including the history of the English language, the history of war, elements of theatre, and President Franklin D. Roosevelt, to name a few. This skill led to his being an in-demand speaker at Memorial Day and Veteran's Day events in Fort Collins, his latest being delivered at the ripe-young age 91.

Shortly after his 18th birthday in 1943, Joe was drafted to serve in WWII. Prior to deployment to the South Pacific, Joe married Nancy Hannigan of Duxbury, MA. Despite the separation of wartime duties, the couple had two daughters, Linda and Jean. Later, in 1956, while stationed in post-war Germany, Joe and Nancy adopted 13-year-old Manfred, orphaned in the war, who became known as William (Bill) once the family returned to the

U.S.

Joe's military career spanned nearly 32 years, fostering multiple positions including: cryptographer, ship's cook (on a P.T. boat), machine gunner, espionage agent handler, communications expert, battalion commander, plans officer, commandant of an enlisted school, and dean of a signal school. Through those three-plus decades, he served in the Philippines, Korea, Berlin, Vietnam, and Turkey. Joe was also stationed at several U.S. bases including Fort Benning (GA), Fort Monmouth (NJ), and he served as a member of the Army General Staff at the Pentagon (which he affectionately called "Fort Fumble.")

As a person who always valued learning and self-improvement, Joe took advantage of several opportunities for advancement provided by the Army, including attending Officer's Candidate School, Fort Riley, KS; Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, KS; and the Army Language School, Monterrey, CA, where he became fluent in the German language in six months.

When asked what he did in the Army, Joe was fond of saying, "A lot of running and hiding," a humble – but false – statement considering the extensive list of awards, ribbons and medals he earned. Through his career, Joe received the following commendations: The Legion of Merit (three times), Meritorious Service Medal, an Army Commendation Medal, a Republic of the Philippines Presidential Unit Citation, a Republic of Vietnam Presidential Unit Citation Badge, a National Defense Service Medal, a Vietnam Service Medal, an Armed Forces Reserve Medal, an Honorable Service Lapel Button, a Parachutist Badge, an Asian-Pacific Campaign Medal, a WWII Victory Medal, and the Army of Occupation Medal.

The majority of Joe's military career was spent in the Army, but he did a short stint in the Navy early on, as well. In 1944, it was learned that the other two triplet brothers were in the Navy, so Joe was transferred. The powers-that-be thought it would be good publicity to have the triplets serving together. All three brothers served in the Navy until WWII was over, but Joe was the only one to re-enlist shortly after. At that time, he was determined to "get something on his shoulders," which was Joe-speak for going to Officer's Candidate School. He was commissioned in 1949, and continued as a career officer in the Regular Army, rising to the rank of Full Colonel at the early age of 47.

A "claim to fame" that Joe enjoyed sharing is that he was able to either meet or see in person, five sitting U.S. Presidents: FDR (1935) in Boston; Dwight D. Eisenhower (1958) - while stationed at Fort Ritchie, MD, Joe saw the President during a visit to the "underground Pentagon" in nearby Pennsylvania; John F. Kennedy, first in 1960, then

several times thereafter, one of which included a handshake when Kennedy visited Joe's unit at Homestead AFB in Florida during the Cuban Missile Crisis; Lyndon B. Johnson, 1968, in the Rose Garden at the White House while the President of Costa Rica was visiting the U.S.; and Richard M. Nixon, several times in the early 1970s, as Joe was stationed in Washington, D.C. at the Pentagon during part of Nixon's administration. Although not President yet, Joe was also pleased to see then-candidate Barack Obama at Colorado State University's campus just weeks before the 2008 election.

A final note on Joe's vast military experience: In 1958, while stationed at Fort Benning, GA, Joe served as company commander in charge of a troop being trained to parachute jump. Despite being afraid of heights, Joe stepped into that leadership role "to set a positive example," and he learned those dangerous skills right alongside his men. Ironically, Joe ended up loving parachuting, and he continued with it as a sport for years following his retirement – until a few too many broken bones made that unwise. In the end, Joe completed 372 jumps.

Joe retired from the Army in August, 1974. Recently divorced, he searched for a new town to call home. He landed in Newburgh, NY, where his best friend, Robert Andreen, was living. The two Colonels met in Korea, and bonded over a shared interest in classical music, poetry, love of the English language, and sports. Together they also assisted in raising Bob's new wife's four teenage daughters, since they were retired and Eileen was still teaching. Important bonds were formed with that family, and many exceptional memories made.

In an effort to socialize and make new friends, Joe got involved with a local community theatre group in nearby Wappingers Fall, called County Players. There, he was introduced to Rachel L. Friedenberg by a mutual friend, RoseMarie Mastrovito (now Navarra). Rose told Rachel, "He's smart, funny...you can have some fun with him for a year or two." Their first date lasted 45 years; they were married on January 14, 1978. This new union provided Joe and Rachel (whom he nick-named The Mighty Rakk) decades of friendship, companionship, intellectual compatibility, theatrical pursuits, travel, community service, laughter, and much love. Their partnership was the example of "happy marriage" that hundreds of friends over the years pointed to and aspired to. And as a "bonus" to their marriage, Joe inherited a new daughter, Mimi, whom he helped to raise and grew to love as his own.

Joe and Rachel's shared passion for theatre united them with a new family of friends with whom they bonded deeply, and "doing theatre" became their primary avocation for more than 30 years. The County Players website lists the extensive number of productions that

Joe either acted in or worked backstage on in some capacity. He also served on the Board there, including a few stints as President. Joe was instrumental in refurbishing the abandoned historic movie theater that County Players purchased in 1977 for its permanent home. Along the way, Joe and Rachel were awarded Lifetime Honorary Membership, a distinction reserved for only a handful of people whose dedication to the theatre made a significant impact. In early theatre-involved years, Joe was also active with two children's theatre groups, as well as the Hudson Valley Gilbert & Sullivan Society.

But Joe's community involvement didn't stop at the theatre doors. He also found himself at the helm of many civic projects, including coordinating the parade held in celebration of the City of Poughkeepsie's 300th birthday, organizing a St. Patrick's Day fundraiser for the Red Cross, organizing a Chili Cook-Off Competition, and presiding at a Roast for an outgoing Mayor.

Since Rachel continued to work until Mimi was expecting her first child (1993), Joe kept himself busy with various temporary jobs. He was open to working anywhere that afforded him opportunities to chat with customers or passers-by; Joe loved meeting new people and had an innate ability to make everyone he met feel special. Some of his notable temp jobs include being a greeter at Bradlee's (similar to Walmart), driving a woman who had lost her license, and working as a C.P.A. (Car Parking Attendant) at a bank. Interestingly, the staff there loved him so much, calling him "the executive without a portfolio," that he actually had the combination to the vault!

But perhaps Joe's favorite retirement job was as a professional tour guide. He worked for a company that booked tours for people visiting the Northeast from all over the world. Joe manned the microphone and regaled his patrons with historic anecdotes, statistics, and interesting little-known-facts of the places they traveled to: Toronto, Canada; New York City (Ellis Island, Liberty Island, World Trade Center); quaint towns in New England; and points of interest all along the Hudson Valley. He was honored as "Tour Guide of the Year" for the State of New York in 1998. And a few years later, in 2004, Joe was awarded "Senior Man of the Year" by the Dutchess County Executive for his many years of civic contributions.

Following the devastating loss of his dear friend Bob, and after marking his 80th birthday, Joe and Rachel turned their sights on making a huge move to Colorado, where Mimi was happily living with her second husband and blended family of four children. The move became a reality in August 2005, and the Cassidys began a new chapter that allowed them to spend significant and quality time with Mimi, Stephen, Elaina, Adam, Megan and

Trent. They rarely missed the kids' basketball/baseball games, choir/band concerts, and they were faithful readers of The Highlighter, the student newspaper that Stephen advised at Rocky Mountain High School until his retirement.

In an effort to make Fort Collins their new home, Joe and Rachel became involved in several community organizations and events, including the Senior Center's SOAP Troup (Slightly Older Adult Players), Bas Bleu Theatre Company, The Senior Center, Temple Or Hadash, the League of Women Voters, Veterans for Peace, and they volunteered in support of various Democratic candidates for state and national office. Also, Joe participated in the Northern Colorado Honor Flight (circa 2009) to Washington, D.C., and he continued to wear the WWII Veteran's hat he received on that trip with pride for the remainder of his life. It was a conversation-starter in many a restaurant, and Joe always engaged with strangers as if they were friends-to-be.

In March 2019, Joe faced a tremendous loss as Rachel passed away unexpectedly and quickly. The scenario of facing life without his soul-mate was daunting. Fortunately, he was able to move into the Good Samaritan Society's Fort Collins Village where Mimi works as the marketing director. His nine decades of strength and perseverance allowed him to push through his ever-present grief and forge an amenable home-life in that community. Joe participated in several social activities and made new friends there which supplemented his existing friend-base, many of whom had stayed connected to Joe following Rachel's death.

Joe's love of reading became compromised in his final years due to macular degeneration, but in earlier years he was an avid reader, often absorbing a book a week. He most enjoyed reading historical biographies, and he brushed up on poetry, though he could recite multiple sonnets and poems by heart well into his 90s.

A dedicated Democrat and patriot, his liberal thinking informed much of his outlook: Joe loved people of all backgrounds, believed in equality for everyone, espoused open-minded philosophies that were always inclusive, ethical, kind, and honest. He valued education, believed in continued learning, and he welcomed respectful dialogue to better understand others, even when he disagreed with them.

Joe's legacy is that he left this world a better place, and most people will say that he touched their lives in ways that shaped or influenced them significantly.

Finally, it will be no surprise to many people that Joe's work on Earth is not finished yet: his last wish was to be a whole-body donation to benefit science. As Rose, his dear friend

from NY said, "Joe has been deployed for one final mission in service to humankind." Tomorrow Link is a Denver-based organization, founded by a Veteran, that provides real-life critical skills training to paramedics, paratroopers, and military medical personnel.

Family members who have preceded Joe in death include all of his eight siblings (John, George, Mary, James, Edward, William, Paul and Leo), his parents (Susan, John, and step-father Jim Regan), his ex-wife Nancy Hannigan Cassidy, his daughter Jean McLaughlin, and his beloved Rakk (Rachel Cassidy).

Joe is survived and remembered with love by his children, Bill (Pat) Cassidy, Linda Bushey, and Mimi (Stephen) Wahlfeldt, in addition to 12 grandchildren, 17 great-grandchildren, and 2 great-great-grandchildren. Numerous friends from around the country will cherish memories of Joe for years to come, as well.

Joe was always gracious to and grateful for the tremendous care and support provided by the staff at Good Sam as he began to face his own declining health. His family is ever-grateful for the excellent, compassionate, loving care provided to Joe at Good Sam while he lived in Assisted Living and Skilled Nursing.

Due to Coronavirus social distancing restrictions, the family will not be hosting a celebration of life at this time. If friends would like to honor his memory, please consider sending donations to the Good Samaritan Society Fort Collins Village's Staff Scholarship Fund in memory of Joe Cassidy (508 W. Trilby Rd. Fort Collins, CO 80525).

Comments



“ The Buckley AFB military Retiree Activities Office (RAO) would like to offer our condolences and our gratitude for Col Cassidy's service to our country in the Army. If you would like help with matters related to casualty assistance, Defense Finance Accounting Service, Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP), etc you can contact our office on Buckley AFB at 720-847-6693. The RAO is staffed by volunteers, all military retirees themselves, and our sole purpose is to provide assistance to any military retirees and surviving spouses with anything related to their military service and/or benefits, in particular during difficult times such as this. We are deeply sorry for your loss.

Steve Young
Lt Col, USAF, Ret
Director, Buckley AFB RAO

Steve Young - July 08 at 01:32 PM



“ Thank you so much, Col. Young. I appreciate your reaching out. Thank you for your service, as well. I wish you could have known my dad; he was an amazing person. Best...Mimi

Mimi - July 09 at 01:49 PM



“ Remembering Joe Cassidy

We all, at TOH, have fond memories of Joe. We delighted in his good cheer, we loved his engagement with all of us sharing his wonderful humor with off color stories and rhymes. After 32 years in the military, he told many stories From those years. He was the kind of person whose memory is worth celebrating. He treated all people with respect and was an inspiration to us all to be kinder and more joyful in our lives. In this way, Joe's life is exceptional and an inspiration to all who knew him.

Or Hadash - July 02 at 10:52 AM



“ 7 files added to the album Memories Album



Mimi - July 01 at 03:35 PM



“ He Is Gone
By David Harkins

You can shed tears that he is gone
Or you can smile because he has lived

You can close your eyes and pray that he will come back
Or you can open your eyes and see all that he has left

Your heart can be empty because you can't see him
Or you can be full of the love that you shared

You can turn your back on tomorrow and live yesterday
Or you can be happy for tomorrow because of yesterday

You can remember him and only that he is gone
Or you can cherish his memory and let it live on

You can cry and close your mind, be empty and turn your back
Or you can do what he would want: smile, open your eyes, love and go on.

Mimi - July 01 at 03:29 PM



“ The first time I met Joe and Rachael the opera was on the radio... the red sox and yankess were playing on the tv. Rachael and I were rooting for NY and Joe for Boston.A true gentleman. Literature and current events always at the forefront. I will miss him.
Chuck Kaufman

Charles Sanford Kaufman - July 01 at 02:50 PM



“ Mimi and Joe's family
I am sorry to hear of his passing. Reading his obituary made me sad that I never knew he had roots in Newburgh, NY, where my family had some roots. Joe's contributions to both military, political, and theater world were truly remarkable. May the love you shared with him live on in your hearts and bring smiles of joy to you.

Kirsten Hartman - June 30 at 02:35 PM



“ How wonderful to hear about all of Joe's accomplishments. Many I had never heard. What a grand life well lived. A memory of mine was going to watch Joe parachute and while he was up there, he allowed me to drive his Vette around the airport. So very cool. We will miss you, Joe.

Vicki Rudolph-Corbett - June 28 at 03:47 PM



“ One of my fondest memories of Grampa is when I was 13 I went to spend a few weeks with him in NY. As we all know he was an avid runner. He asked me if I wanna go for a little run around the block. So 13 year old me said sure. A little run around the block turned into 6 miles of him running and me walking really fast. RIP Gramps

Joe bushey - June 27 at 07:05 PM



“ What a great memory. Thanks for sharing, Joey.

Mimi - June 28 at 01:08 PM



“ Such a beautiful and thoughtful tribute to Joe. Thank you so much for sharing! I knew much of this information as Joe shared many stories during the fun times we had together with your mom. However, I didn't know several included in this tribute. What an amazing man! I have missed Joe and Rachel since they moved to CO, but always knew they were only a phone call away. I will always hold memories close and reflect on them with a smile on my face and love in my heart. Rest peacefully! Love you ... from "Banana"!

Anna Marie - June 29 at 09:32 AM



“ 17 files added to the album Memories Album



Mimi - June 27 at 06:48 PM



“ 5 files added to the album Memories Album



Mimi - June 27 at 05:55 PM



“ 5 files added to the album Memories Album



Mimi - June 27 at 05:55 PM