

TYUS KIRBY DENNEY

'Real son' of Confederate veteran - Obituary



DENNEY, TYUS KIRBY Age 91, a native of Cullman, AL and resident of Birmingham, AL, passed away peacefully on Wednesday, March 6, 2013. He was a member of Plainview Baptist Church and a proud veteran of World War II where he served in the Pacific. His two great passions in life were fishing and beekeeping which he took up at age 12. He continued to fish well into his 80's and was still tending bees at his death.

He was a member of the Alabama Division of the Sons of Confederate Veterans and took great pride in being one of only two surviving sons of a Civil War Veteran in Alabama. He was preceded in death by his parents Thomas Jefferson Denney and Dora Hill Denney; his loving wife of 65 years Christine Overton Denney; brothers Wiley P. Denney, Bernice Warren, Clifford Warren and Pierce Warren; and sister Vivian Smith.

Tyus was survived by his daughters Rolline Sisson (Larry), Brynda Roper (Bob), Sonja Everett (Greg); grandchildren Brent Sisson (Delanda), Kelly Gillespie (David), Heather Holman (Clint), Christopher Sisson (Marsha), Ashley Donnelly (Sam), Chad Holt (Stacy) and John Nagy; 9 great grandchildren and one great-great grandchild. He was a loving husband, father and grandfather.

The family would like to acknowledge and express gratitude to Dr. David Lemak, the Staff of Trinity Baptist Hospital and Brenda Heaton for their kindhearted care and especially to Reverend Mary Seale for her devoted friendship. Visitation will be Friday, March 8, 2013 from 6:00 pm until 8:00 pm at Ridout's Trussville Chapel. Funeral service will be at 1:00 pm on Saturday, March 9, 2013 at Etha Baptist Church in Cullman, the body will lie in repose at the church one hour prior to service time.



'Real son' of Confederate veteran keeps busy in Tarrant

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Greg Garrison -- The Birmingham News By Greg Garrison -- The Birmingham News

Tyus K. Denney, 90, doesn't know a lot about the Civil War, except that his father fought in it as a Confederate soldier 149 years ago.

Denney shows a picture of himself taken around 1930 with his father, Thomas Jefferson Denney, a former Confederate soldier, behind him. Also in the picture is his late mother, Dora Denney, and his sister, Vivian, who is 88 and lives in Cullman. (NEWS

STAFF/GREG GARRISON)

"My daddy was 80 when I come in this world," said Denney at his home in Tarrant, where he keeps 10 beehives in the backyard to harvest honey. "I was 13 years old when he died. He never did talk about the Civil War. He never said nothing about it."

But his father, Thomas Jefferson Denney, is heavily documented as having fought in the Civil War, as part of Company H in the 31st Alabama Infantry regiment. He was captured by Union forces on June 15, 1864 near Marietta, Ga., and held prisoner at Rock Island Barracks, Illinois, where he signed an oath of allegiance to the United States upon his release on June 18, 1865.

That makes Tyus Denney one of the last living "real sons" of Confederate veterans, according to the Sons of Confederate Veterans, an organization made up mostly of descendants several generations further removed from their Confederate ancestors. Denney's sister, Vivian Smith, 88, of Cullman, is one of the last living "real daughters" of Confederate veterans.

The Sons of Confederate Veterans keeps track of the number of "real sons," and "real daughters," believed to be eight or fewer in Alabama, said Jim Shackelford, adjutant for the Forrest Camp #1435 branch of the Sons of Confederate Veterans.

People today marvel and wonder why women of childbearing age were marrying elderly men in the Depression era, Shackelford said.

"It was hard times," he said. "A lot of these women needed support and these Confederate veterans got a pension, maybe \$13 to \$20 a month. That was a lot of money in the Depression."

Alabama and other former Confederate states paid out Confederate pensions as late as the 1950s, Shackelford said. Tom Strain of Athens, attending a state meeting of Sons of Confederate Veterans on Saturday in Birmingham, said a national database kept by the group lists 48 men who are "real sons" of Confederate veterans. Ten years ago, there were more than 500, he said.

Thomas Jefferson Denney was born in 1844, according to the 1900 U.S. Census, so he was about 18 when he enlisted with the Confederate Army in 1862. He was in his eighties when he married his last wife, Dora, a widow. "She was in her forties when I was born," Denney said. Thomas and Dora had three children together before the Civil War veteran died at age 91 in 1934.

Tyus Denney was born May 8, 1921. He pointed out a picture of himself, around age 10, and his sister, about 8, with his parents. His father wore dark-rimmed glasses, a dark suit jacket and had a bushy white mustache and long wispy beard. Tyus now resembles him with a bushy white mustache, but he shaves his beard.

'Amazing'

Denney has three daughters, including Rolline Sisson, 67, of Tarrant. She never thought it was odd that her grandfather fought in the Civil War.

"I've just lived with it all my life and didn't think that much of it," Sisson said. "A lot of people are amazed. It is amazing."

Denney still drives from time to time and goes out to eat with his daughters at the Cedar House in Tarrant, or the Burger King or McDonald's.

Taking care of his honey bees keeps him active daily, and he eats honey every morning on oatmeal or on crumbled generic corn flakes he buys from a discount store. He points to a tiny red mark where a bee stung him recently. "I mashed one and he got me," he said. "It hurts, but it don't swell."

Denney wears a face net around the bees, but no protection on his arms, torso and legs.

In 1986, the Sons of Confederate Veterans made Denney a lifetime member, not required to pay dues. He sometimes goes to Civil War reenactments.

"I just watch," he said. "I don't know nothing about the war."

He said he is a veteran of World War II, trained as a machine gunner at the end of the war, but he never saw combat. Denney worked for 39 years at the Dolcito Quarry in Tarrant as a heavy equipment operator. After retiring he spent a lot of time fishing on Emerald Valley Lake.

He pointed to four mounted largemouth bass on a wall in his home, all over eight pounds. "I went out when it was cold, using creek minnows out of Five Mile Creek and Turkey Creek," he said. "I've quit fishing. I've got too old. They don't want me out in a boat."