



James Willbanks

February 19, 1919 - February 15, 2008

Services for James M. "Jim" Willbanks, 88, will be held on Wednesday, February 20, 2008 at 1:00 PM at Pollard United Methodist Church in Tyler with the Reverend Richard Luna and Dr. James H. Reiter officiating. Graveside services will follow at Rose Hill Cemetery. Visitation will be held on Tuesday evening, February 19, 2008 from 6:00-8:00 PM at Stewart Family Funeral Home, 7525 Old Jacksonville Highway in Tyler. Mr. Willbanks passed away on Friday, February 15, 2008 at Hospice of East Texas, "The Home Place". He was born on February 19, 1919 in Athens, Texas to the late Eva May Williams Willbanks and John Henry Willbanks. He went on to graduate from North Dallas High School; Tyler Junior College with a 4.0 GPA, Summa Cum Laude. He was also a member of Alpha Chi, a National Honor Society. He earned a Bachelor of Arts Degree from UTT. He took many courses while serving in the U.S. Army and while working as an Executive for General Motors. He volunteered for the Army on December 8, 1941, one day after the attack on Pearl Harbor, but there were so many men volunteering in Dallas, he could not be sworn in until 4 days later on December 12. He went on to serve in Mineral Wells, Texas, Camp Barkley, Texas, and in Camp Clairborne, Alexandria, Louisiana where he "pulled maneuvers". He also served in Lathrop, California and Camp Ellis, Illinois, where he helped train the outfit with which he went to the South Pacific. He landed on Milne Bay, New Guinea, Biak Netherlands, East Indies, and Tacloban Leyte, Philippines. His company had been completely outfitted with all the new equipment to go in on

the invasion of Japan on November 3, 1945. America was expecting one-million American casualties; and instead, two atomic bombs were dropped and he returned to the States on November 3, 1945. After the War, he was in the Texas State Guard, a Battalion Commander with the rank of Lt. Col.

While serving as an Executive with General Motors, Mr. Willbanks was relocated ten times while working in thirty western states; and concurrently worked, lived and visited fourteen foreign countries, before retiring in Tyler in 1963. During that time, he also served as Chairman of the Board and Chief Executive Officer of Southern Auto Supply and Business Consulting Associates. He was a member of the Board of Hollywood Portraits and Management Consultant to many other companies, as well. He taught "Management" full and part-time for over twenty-one years at Tyler Junior College. Mr. Willbanks has served as Chairman of the Board of three different Methodist Churches in El Paso, Texas, Denver, Colorado and Pollard Methodist Church in Tyler. He has served many offices in the church over the years, including a Lay Speaker and Sunday School teacher for over fifty years, as well as a Lay Reader and member of the Board. He was most proud of his Great-Grandfathers, who included David Franklin Pulley who was the circuit-riding Methodist preacher in Henderson County from 1880 to 1920; and his Great-Grandfather Eason Gee, who came to Texas on May 25, 1935 and fought in the Texas Revolution. As a result of Eason Gee's accomplishments, James Willbanks became a proud member of the "First Families of Texas". His Great-Great Grandmother Gee and her three sons came to what is now Troup, Texas in 1837. His Great-Grandfather, William Gee volunteered for the 3rd Texas Calvary on the steps of the Tyler Courthouse on June 3, 1861 and fought in many battles until the end of the War Between the States. Mr. Willbanks was a member of the Tyler Safety Commission and Chairman for two years. It was during this time as Chairman that a program called "Deathless Days" was started. Tyler went 145 days without a traffic death and this set an all-time record which still stands today. He was a member of the Civil Service Commission and was Chairman for five years. While in Tyler, he

also served as a member of the Airport Advisory Board, Commander of the Disabled Veterans for two years, and Smith County Veterans Council for two years. He was a fifty-year member of St. John's Masonic Lodge #53; a fifty-year Scottish Rite Mason and a Charter Member of Sharon Shrine Temple.

During his lifetime, Mr. Willbanks was an honorary citizen of the States of Nebraska, Colorado, and Missouri; as well as an "Admiral of American Airlines Flagship Fleet", a member of "Continental Airlines Presidents' Club", "United Airlines 100,000 Miles Club With Two Stars", and TWA's "Ambassador's Club". Mr. Willbanks became an avid runner at the age of 65 and as of July 25, 2000, he had clocked-in over 10,000 miles, many of which were at the Woodcreek Athletic Club, where he was a member of the "Club 100" . . . The next oldest person in that prestigious club was thirty years his junior. It was at this time he participated in numerous local races and won over 20 medals in his age group. Mr. Willbanks was preceded in death by his mother Eva May Willbanks; his father, John Henry Willbanks; his brother John Willbanks; and his sister Faye McFarland. He is survived by his beloved wife of 56 years, Nella Ellis Willbanks; son Geoffrey Willbanks and wife Pattie of Tyler; son Kevin Willbanks of Tyler; daughter Melissa Willbanks Callahan and husband Larry of Tyler; sister Tess Wallace of Dallas; granddaughter Britteny Willbanks of San Diego, California; grandson Clinton Willbanks and Nicholas Jarrett, both of Tyler; nephew Jimmy Wallace of Dallas; nieces Caroline Jones of Garland and Susan Pope of Las Cruces, New Mexico. He is also survived by his life-long beloved friend, Doyle Moore of Tyler. Pallbearers will be Nicholas Jarrett, Clinton Willbanks, Larry Blackwell, Jimmy Wallace, Wayne Kinsala, and Keith Williams. Honorary pallbearers will be Doyle Moore and members of the Pollard Methodist Church Men's Bible Class. Memorials in honor of James Willbanks may be made to Pollard United Methodist Church, 3030 Copeland Rd., Tyler, Texas 75701 or the Hospice of East Texas, 4111 University Blvd., Tyler, Texas 75701.

Tribute Wall

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“ *My dad was the best dad a daughter could have. He was so wise and always there when I needed him. I am so very blessed to be his daughter. I know he is in a better place now and will be there when I get to heaven.*

*I love you dad,
Melissa*

Terry Moore - February 15, 2008 at 12:00 AM

WH

“ *A few words I wish to say
to pay tribute to Jim Willbanks on this day
I have known him for over 25 years
His daughter Melissa a friend to me very dear
I remember when he ran in the azalea race
At his age he ran with much grace
M & M's were his favorite candy
His family always kept some handy
He loved his family very much
Many lives did Jim touch
To all the family I send my love and prayers to you
From Wendye Van Housen that is who*

Wendye Van Housen - February 15, 2008 at 12:00 AM