

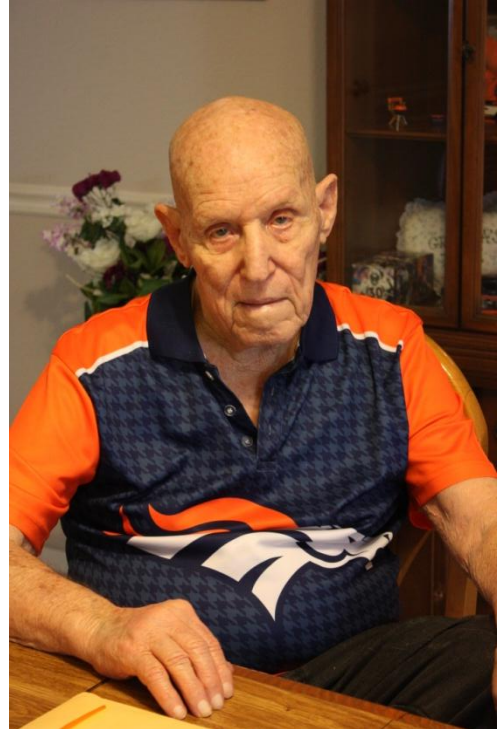
Wayne Smith

A Life of Public Service

By Brit Macias

Wayne Smith, born in January 1927 in Brownwood, Texas, has spent the better part of his 90 years as a public servant. Not only did he serve in the Navy during World War II, Smith also served for 22 years as a local public servant in Mertzon.

Smith's early life was spent in Coleman, Texas during the Great Depression where his family had inherited some land. At the age of 13, Smith recalls, he and a friend visiting him from Kerrville went swimming in an old tank outside of town, but there were some electrical lines that had fallen and Smith and his friend both walked into them. The electrocution killed Smith's friend and scarred Smith badly.



A few years after that difficult incident, Smith found himself at bootcamp for the United States Navy. When training concluded, the Seamen were put on a train, where Smith began talking with a young man sitting next to him who just so happened to know a girl in San Angelo, Texas, where Smith's family had recently moved. He showed Smith the young lady's photo and

Smith wrote her a letter, to which she responded and they continued to correspond for the entirety of Smith's service, only meeting once when he came home on leave.

During Smith's time in the Navy, he recalls to CRN the day a twin-engine Betty almost hit their ship. "I stood and watched that plane come in. It went down just before it hit the ship but still



Enemy plane narrowly misses Smith's ship

caught us on fire.” Smith explained to CRN that his quarters were in visible line with the plane coming in. Smith was part of the Repair Party aboard the ship, dedicated to repairing the ship and putting out any fires. He boarded this particular ship just after it had taken a torpedo hit. Of his time serving our country, Smith humbly states, “I wasn’t a hero or anything like that, I was just one of the guys.”



After his time in the Navy, Smith returned to San Angelo, Texas to marry the young pen pal, Margaret Haas, he’d fallen in love with during his time aboard a ship. The soon-to-be Mr. and Mrs. Smith faced some opposition from Margaret’s pastor, Rodney Gibson, of First Presbyterian Church of San Angelo (now St. Paul’s Presbyterian) due to the fact she was only 15 years old. Gibson claimed he would not marry Wayne and Margaret until she was 16. So, when she turned 16, the two sweethearts married on September 5, 1947. “My brother said it would last about a month, but it lasted nearly 60 years,” Smith recalls, chuckling.

Out of the navy and back in the States, Smith began roofing with his family, finding he didn’t care much for it, and he tried his hand at masonry. After completing a 4 year apprenticeship, he laid brick until 1960. He then worked a freight line for 10 years before moving to Mertzon to work for an energy plant owned by Conoco, later becoming Targa Resources. “Wayne always walked into work smiling with a positive attitude. He is very inspiring and a great mentor. Wayne is very proud of his family and grandkids,” former coworker, Dennis Mendiola said of Smith. Wayne worked at the plant until his retirement in 1997, though he was busy delving into local public service as he worked there.

Wayne Smith was a Mertzon City Council Member for 2 years, Mertzon Mayor for 8 years, Irion County Commissioner for two terms totaling 12 years, a volunteer fire fighter until, as he puts it, "I got too old and it got to bother me too much to fight fire," and he was in charge of Ambulance Services as an EMT for years. Not to mention, Smith was on the Board of Trustees for MHMR for 15 years, as well as a member of the San Angelo Emergency Corps.

Upon retirement, Smith was awarded with a beautiful Texas-shaped plaque honoring him for his 22 years of public service. Though certainly a commendable achievement, Smith says his greatest achievement has been "raising a family"—a family that consisted of his wife of 60 years, two daughters, one son, five grandchildren, and eight great-grandchildren. "Wayne is a dedicated family man. (He) and Margaret always took care of us guys and made us part of the family," former coworker, Herb Heflin, stated about Smith's family. Raising a family is a wonderful achievement, indeed.



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