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Democracy Dies in Darkness

DONALD M. MURTHA, FORMER POSTAL UNION COUNSEL, DIES AT 88



December 17, 1993 at 7:00 p.m. EST

Donald M. Murtha, 88, a retired general counsel of the American Postal Workers Union and a former Labor Department official, died of heart ailments Dec. 17 at Georgetown University Medical Center.

While serving as general counsel of the postal union, he sued the U.S. Postal Service on behalf of employees for violations of the Federal Salary Comparability Act and the Fair Labor Standards Act. The result was a multimillion dollar settlement in favor of 800,000 workers.

Mr. Murtha, a resident of Arlington, was born in St. Paul, Minn., and grew up in North Dakota. He attended St. Thomas College in St. Paul and received a law degree from the University of Minnesota. From 1934 to 1939, he was an assistant U.S. attorney in North Dakota.

In 1939, he moved to Washington and joined the Labor Department. He became chief of the wage and hours division of the solicitor's office. In 1953, he resigned from the government.

For the next 17 years, Mr. Murtha practiced labor law in association with Herbert L. Thatcher. In 1970, Mr. Murtha was named general counsel of the United Federation of Postal Clerks.

It was the period in which the Post Office Department was becoming the U.S. Postal Service and postal unions also were reorganizing. In 1971, he was named general counsel of the American Postal Workers Union, which was formed through the merger of the United Federation of Postal Clerks and other unions. He retired in 1975.

Mr. Murtha traveled widely as a member of the American Bar Association's committee on international labor law.

In the 1930s, he founded the North Dakota Young Democratic Club and served as its first president. In the Washington area, he remained active in Democratic Party affairs. He also was a member of Arlingtonians for a Better County, the Arlington Committee of 100 and the Arlington Historical Society.

Survivors include his wife of 54 years, Miriam T. Murtha of Arlington; three children, Michael Murtha of Arlington, Brian Murtha of Santa Cruz, Calif., and Kevin Murtha of Olympia, Wash.; and four grandchildren.

W. MITCHELL DIGGES JR.

Farmer

W. Mitchell Digges Jr., 80, a retired tobacco farmer who helped launch a regional soil conservation project for Southern Maryland in the 1940s, died of emphysema Dec. 15 at Physicians Memorial Hospital in La Plata. He lived in La Plata.

Mr. Digges retired in the early 1980s after raising tobacco for about 55 years at "Locust Grove Farm" in Port Tobacco. The property has been in his family since the early 1800s. He was born on the farm and graduated from La Plata High School. He attended Duke University.

Mr. Digges was an organizer of the Southern Maryland Resource Conservation and Development Project, which helped develop erosion control and contour farming programs in conjunction with the U.S. Agriculture Department.

He received a national award in 1992 from the Izaak Walton League of America for service to soil and water conservation programs. He was board president of the Charles County Fair, a director of the Maryland State Fair, a founder of the La Plata Lions Club and member of the La Plata Volunteer Fire Department.

Survivors include a sister, Eleanor Digges Harrington of Cambridge, Md., and a brother, Edward S. Digges of La Plata.

EDITH KIRKMAN BIELSKI

Kindergarten Teacher

Edith Kirkman Bielski, 58, a kindergarten teacher in Prince George's County public schools since 1969, died of a stroke Dec. 14 at Anne Arundel Medical Center in Annapolis.

Mrs. Bielski, who lived in Annapolis, was born in Flushing, N.Y. She received a bachelor's degree from the State University of New York at Oneonta and a master's degree in education at the University of Maryland.

Mrs. Bielski came to the Washington area in 1968. She taught at Glenarden Woods Elementary in Lanham and other schools before joining the faculty of Kenilworth Elementary in Bowie 10 years ago.

Mrs. Bielski was a Girl Scout and Brownie troop leader and a member of the parish of Sacred Heart Catholic Church in Bowie, where she was religious education coordinator.

She sponsored foreign exchange students from Chile, France, Barbados and Japan.

Survivors include her husband, Dr. Peter Anthony Bielski of Annapolis; a son, Peter Bielski of Bowie; three daughters, Patricia Patterson of Bowie, Gayle Steinke of Vail, Colo., and Jaqueline Walls of San Diego; her mother, Hazel Ehrhorn of Flushing; a brother, Donald Kirkman of Annandale; and eight grandchildren.

CHARLES W. LONG

Building Engineer and Chauffeur

Charles W. Long, 77, a retired building engineer and chauffeur, died of cancer Dec. 13 at his home in Silver Spring. He had lived in the Washington area since 1945.

Mr. Long was a building engineer for 33 years for the General Services Administration, and he retired in 1978. He also worked for 37 years as a chauffeur for Geico Corp. He retired from Geico about five years ago.

He then was a security guard for the Acacia Group in Washington, and he retired in May.

Mr. Long was a native of Cincinnati. He served in the Navy in the Pacific during World War II.

He was a former Mason.

His first wife, Annie Parker Long, died in the 1950s.

Survivors include his wife, Cordia M. Long of Silver Spring; their six children, Charlene Vaughn of Silver Spring, Gloria Tucker of Forestville, Ronald Long of Takoma Park, Donna Mazyck of Laurel, Robert Long of Columbia and Sylvia Long-Tolbert of Greenbelt; two stepdaughters, Delores Lawson of Largo and Shirley Paige of Bethesda; 17 grandchildren; and six great-grandchildren.

LOUIS B. SIMS

Police Sergeant

Louis B. Sims, 80, a retired detective sergeant in the Metropolitan Police Department, died of cancer Dec. 15 at his home in Blanch, N.C.

A native of Eheart, Va., Mr. Sims moved to the Washington area in the late 1930s. He joined the police department in 1938. He was a homicide detective for part of his career, and he was in the traffic investigation bureau when he retired in 1965.

A former resident of Arlington, he moved to North Carolina after he retired. For about five years in the late 1960s and early 1970s, he was a farm agent in Caswell County, N.C.

Mr. Sims was a member of the Association of Retired Police Officers of Washington, D.C., Inc., and a former member of Resurrection Lutheran Church in Arlington.

Survivors include his wife of 52 years, the former Mary Alice Smith of Blanch; three sons, Robert L. and Paul F. Sims, both of Richmond, and David W. Sims of Blanch; two sisters, Edith Sims of Danville, Va., and Anna S. Spicer of Gordonsville, Va.; four grandchildren; and a great-grandchild.