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Cleveland Harper Thayer

Dec. 11, 1925 - Aug. 26, 2020

Born December 11, 1925 in Raleigh NC and raised in Asheboro NC, Cleveland Harper Thayer was the son of Cleveland Thayer and Helen Earle Harper Thayer. Tall and strong as a hickory, Harper lived a good 94 years.

Harper is lovingly remembered by his family and friends for the quiet and unassuming manner in which he applied his industrial engineering skills to organizing materials, tasks and schedules, while still being available to listen attentively and help out whenever possible. In challenging times he was calm and focused. At other times, a crinkling of his eyes and a sudden burst of laughter revealed his sense of humor.

Harper was active in the Boy Scouts, attaining the rank of Eagle and then the Bronze, Silver, and Gold Eagle Palms. He was later proud to attend the Eagle ceremonies for both of his sons, Cleve and Laurence, and two of his grandsons.

Harper completed high school at Oak Ridge Military Institute. He then served in the Army for two years during World War II. At the age of 18 he was a jeep driver in France and Germany with the 100th Reconnaissance Troop of the 100th Infantry Division of the 7th Army. Often wearing a towel around his neck, Harper would explain, “I got cold in France, and I’ve never been warm since.”

After completing his military service, he matriculated at North Carolina State College, where he graduated summa cum laude with a degree in industrial engineering. In 1952, he married Julia Ross Lambert in Asheboro NC, and last May they celebrated their 68th wedding anniversary. Together they built their home in Morganton, raised

their children, collaborated on Julia's craft projects and shared a love of travel and learning.

Harper was a registered Professional Engineer for 40 years. He worked for Dan River Mills and Blue Bell, Inc. until 1955 when he came to Morganton to head the engineering department for Shadowline, Inc. He worked there for 37 years as Vice-President of Engineering and Vice-President of Manufacturing.

An active member of Grace Episcopal Church in Morganton, Harper served in various capacities. He was on the vestry 8 times and was Junior Warden 8 times. In addition, he served as Scoutmaster for the troop affiliated with the church and was also a youth advisor for 12 years. Harper served on the finance committee and was in charge of special funds for over a decade. After he retired, he cataloged every grave in the old church cemetery. He and his wife Julia were instrumental in the creation of a memorial garden and donated a Celtic cross for the garden in 1997.

Harper served on the Morganton Recreation Commission and was a charter member of the informal, jovial and active "West Union Athletic Club." He also worked as chairman of the Morganton Board of Elections for several years. Harper was a member of Rotary for 65 years and served a term as president of the Morganton Rotary Club where he was recognized as a Paul Harris Fellow.

Harper loved to be physically active. He played tennis regularly until he was in his late eighties, remaining flexible by taking regular yoga lessons at Phifer Wellness Center. Harper exuded a passion for endurance outdoor activities. He biked the entire Blue Ridge Parkway in sections from Front Royal VA to Cherokee NC and also hiked over 1700 miles of the Appalachian Trail. He also made many week-long canoe trips on rivers throughout America, but primarily in the lakes of Quetico Provincial Park on the Canadian side of the Boundary Waters, which he enjoyed in the company of a "band of brothers"--local friends and fellow paddlers--and sometimes his son, Cleve

and Cleve's sons. In the Adirondacks, Harper's daughter Ross and her sons were also able to join the paddling adventure. Memories of Harper include "Granddaddy" jury-rigging a sail for a canoe and cooking up a stack of wild blueberry pancakes on a cast iron skillet over a campfire.

In addition to his wife Julia, Harper is survived by his three children: Cleveland Harper Thayer, Jr. and his wife Janet Lyn Thayer of Pacific Grove CA; Laurence Lambert Thayer of King George VA; and Julia Ross Thayer Henderson and her husband, Robert Paul Henderson, Jr. of Dedham MA; and by his five grandsons, Drew Cleveland Thayer and his wife Lillian Pine Hancock, who recently gave birth to Harper's great grandson Baxter Huntington Thayer of Denver CO; Reed Wells Thayer of Davis CA; Paul Thayer Henderson of Los Angeles CA, David Lambert Henderson of Denver CO, and Patrick Harper Henderson of Boston, MA.

The family extends their deep appreciation to the caring staff at Grace Ridge Retirement Community and to compassionate caregivers Kim Bingham and Sandie Collier.

A Celebration of Life will be held at Grace Episcopal Church at some future time.

Memorials may be directed to the Grace Episcopal Church Memorial Garden Fund, 303 South King Street, Morganton, NC 28655 or to the Library Foundation of Burke County, 204 South King Street, Morganton, NC 28655.

Sossoman Funeral Home and Crematory Center is assisting the family with the arrangements.

Tribute Wall

No tributes added yet.