

M E M O R I A L S

by

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Since last we met, 216 compatriots have been summoned to eternal rest. Of these, some were known universally; others largely in their home communities and States. I mention the names of four: Compatriot Harry S. Truman; Compatriot Lyndon B. Johnson; Compatriot Martin I. Stutler; and Compatriot Robert L. Sonfield. In honoring all of our departed compatriots, it is altogether fitting that special tribute be accorded the one we all knew best - Bob Sonfield.

A native Texan, born in Nacogdoches on March 6, 1893, he was justly proud of his heritage. His father, Leon Sonfield, was then a Methodist minister. He resigned the active ministry; became a lawyer; and subsequently a Justice of the Texas Supreme Court.

A graduate of the University of Texas Law School in 1915, Compatriot Sonfield was admitted to the Bar of the Lone Star State almost immediately upon attaining his majority. After completing postgraduate studies at Columbia University in 1916,

he returned to Beaumont, where his family had moved, to engage in the practice of law with his father.

In the bright, mid-morning of his long life, on April 6, 1917, the very day of the declaration of a state of war, Compatriot Sonfield left the practice of law and volunteered. He served overseas as a combat infantry officer with the 36th Division. As company commander, he participated in the Champaigne and Meuse-Argonne offensives. Following the Armistice in 1918, he was detailed to Berlin, Germany as an American representative on the Inter-Allied Commission on the Repatriation of Allied Prisoners of War; the Inter-Allied Commission on the Repatriation of Russian prisoners; and the American Military Commission supervising prison camps in which Allied and Russian prisoners were confined. He was cited by the British Government for his aid to British soldiers.

Compatriot Sonfield resumed the practice of law in Houston in 1921, continuing until 1942 when, at high noon in his professional career, he returned to active duty in World War II. He served for a time with the parachute troops and was thereafter assigned to the Infantry School, Fort Benning, Georgia, as Staff Judge Advocate. At the request of the Army, he authored "A Guide for the Administration of Military Justice" which was widely used as a textbook and also at the Nuremberg

As one of his sons has observed, he "devoted all of his available time to the support of the United States of America and the principles upon which its foundation rests."

As President General, he was a dauntless, dedicated and dynamic leader. He preached, as he lived, Americanism. A stirring message to the membership of the SAR expressed his philosophy:

"There is need here today for a re-dedication to the principles and ideals of the Constitution. Whether or not our nation will survive depends upon you and me, and upon Americans everywhere. We must be vigilant. We must be active, think for ourselves and not permit others to think for us. We must take an active part in religious and civic affairs. We must know what we want in no uncertain terms. We must not fail to exercise at each and every opportunity, our greatest privilege - the right to vote. Most important of all, we must not lose our faith in God."

A source of strength to the National Society is the unabated activity of most of its Past Presidents General, at all levels, Chapter, State and National. Compatriot Sonfield continued to attend regularly the meetings of the Trustees in Washington twice a year and the Annual Congresses. His advice, frequently sought, was always sound. He realized that younger membership should be augmented. He recognized that young members must be afforded the privilege of significant service as Chapter and State officers, as chairmen of National

committees, chairmen of our Congresses, and general officers. It was thus perfectly natural that when a group of younger SARs decided they could best serve the Society by organizing a new Chapter for them to seek the advice and aid of Compatriot Sonfield and his great good friend Compatriot Sterling. And so, the Houston Chapter came into existence and is today one of our most flourishing Chapters.

Later, he promoted and was largely instrumental in the organization of the thriving Heart of Texas Chapter.

A cardinal characteristic of this able advocate, valiant soldier, and fearless patriot, was his forthrightness. As I remarked in December of 1967 when presenting him the Gold Good Citizenship Medal which he so richly merited: "He was never on the fence; he did not have to reflect upon what was right; he knew what was right. But right or wrong, he was never in doubt."

He relished companionship, and particularly with SAR intimates. An abiding satisfaction to six Past Presidents General and to President General Morgan is, I am sure, that we were privileged to share his friendship for four memorable days after the Congress last year at the home of Past President General Burn. He was a raconteur non-pareil and he regaled us with his wartime experiences, and, to those of his own profession, his legal battles.

A consecrated churchman, Compatriot Sonfield was for sixteen years a member of the Official Board of St. Paul's Methodist Church of Houston; and for eight years taught a Sunday School class composed of Rice University seniors. Later, he became an active member of St. Luke's Methodist Church of Houston. He was ever mindful of the exhortation of the prophet Micah: "And what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God."

Full of years and weighted with honors, Compatriot Sonfield passed away a year ago today in Houston. We rejoice in the wonderful life he lived. As a lawyer with a magnificent record of professional service; as a soldier; and as a member and President General of the Sons of the American Revolution, he contributed mightily to the preservation of our beloved Republic. He was a shining Texas symbol of Americanism, a twentieth century patriot, a man who loved and served his country beyond the call of duty, a man who loved his fine family - his adored Margie, his sons and her son who became their sons, and a man who loved and served the Sons of the American Revolution with fidelity and devotion.

It may truly be said: "His life was gentle, and the elements so mix'd in him that Nature might stand up and say to all the world, 'This was a man.'"