

J. Roger Sisson

423/C

106th Infantry Division

Stalag 13-C

J. Roger Sisson, 87, of Tiverton

W.W. II veteran, served in Mass. House of Representatives

J. Roger Sisson, 87, of Tiverton, died peacefully on Wednesday, Sept. 3, 2008, surrounded by his children. Born in Portsmouth on August 14, 1921, he was the second of four children born to the late George L. and Mary (Corcoran) Sisson. He was the husband of 64 years to the late Jacqueline Hamel Sisson who died in May, 2008.

Mr. Sisson lived a full, storied and rich life. He attended Spencer Borden Elementary School, Morton Junior High School and BMC Durfee High School in Fall River. He enrolled at Valley Forge Military Academy in Wayne, Penn., from 1942 to 1944, completing college courses early to enlist in the armed forces.

A veteran of World War II and a true patriot, J. Roger was a member of the **106th Infantry Division**, where he served as technical sergeant. In January, 1945, after having fought in the Battle of the Bulge, he was declared missing in action. He was held as a prisoner of war in Germany for nearly six months until being liberated on Good Friday, 1945, by troops commanded by General George Patton. He was awarded the Bronze Star, Purple Heart, three Battle Stars and numerous other citations. He attended Providence College on the GI Bill after his service.

As a civilian, Mr. Sisson continued his commitment to public service. In 1954, he was elected to the Massachusetts House of Representatives, where he served for three consecutive terms representing Ward 9 in Fall River and the Town of Somerset. During his tenure he was committed to labor, employment and land-use issues. In 1959, he led a walk from Fall River to Boston to raise awareness about transit worker rights, which paved the way for productive, strike ending negotiations.

A communications professional, much of his career was spent as part owner and operator of the Fall River radio station, WALE. His early morning radio program, "The Somerset Story," broadcast from the kitchen of his 159 Brayton Avenue home in Somerset, made him a local celebrity. Listeners tuned in for the daily "Clothes Line Report," and will long remember his trademark "Nice day today!" and "the panorama is simply outstanding!"

J. Roger loved animals, and in 1947, together with his wife chose to raise their family on a working horse farm in Somerset. In 1964, the family moved to Tiverton where he continued his active interest in local politics and community issues. He helped organize "Navy Band" events at the Middle Avenue Gazebo, a longtime neighborhood favorite.

Known for his strong and vocal opinions, Mr. Sisson will be remembered for his interest in history, politics and current events. He was a skilled story teller, with the capacity to capture an audience with his humor, emotion and candor.

Roger leaves his children, Jay Sisson and his wife Marisa Quinn of Jamestown, Rick and Donna Sisson of Portsmouth, Jacqueline Sisson Roppolo and husband Frank of Bridgewater, Mass., Gregory Sisson and his partner Joan Woodward of Tiverton, and Lincoln and Joanne Sisson of Warren; a brother and business partner of many years, George L. Sisson Jr., and his wife Patricia (Doyle) Sisson of Bristol; his grandchildren, Aura Sisson-Castro of Jacksonville, Fla., Sarah Sisson of New York, NY, Rachel and Julia Sisson of Portsmouth, Laura and Gregory Settino of Hingham, Mass., Christine Sisson of Nantucket, Alexia, Ryan and Mia Sisson of Warren, and Katelin and Grahm Sisson of New York, NY; a sister-in-law, Madeline Hamel of Westport; a brother-in-law, William H. McGrady of Naples, Fla., and numerous nieces and nephews. He was the father of the late Paula Sisson and Christine Sisson-Settino, and brother of the late Lawrence Sisson and Nancy Sisson McGrady.

A Mass of Christian Burial will be held on Saturday, Sept. 13 at 10:30 a.m. at St. Barnabus Church, East Main Road, Portsmouth.

Note: From reference to being liberated by General Patton, I assume he was in Stalag XIII-C, Hammelburg - J. West

Kerr: For J. Roger Sisson, the stories came only now and then
September 12, 2008

J. Roger Sisson hung the wooden spoon on the wall as a reminder. It was the spoon he'd carved in the prison camp, where he went from 190 pounds to 104.

"He didn't talk about it much, but every once in a while he'd tell a story and you'd sit there with your mouth open," says Linc Sisson, his youngest son and a Providence police officer. "If we didn't eat all our food, he'd look at us and say 'I'd have killed for that when I was a prisoner of war.' "

Sisson let his war in occasionally. As he and his wife, Jacqueline, raised their seven kids in Somerset and he became a true community presence, there would be times when World War II and the German prison camp would claim a place in the family conversation.

Jay Sisson, another son who is a senior construction manager at Brown, found a yellowed press clipping from the Fall River Herald News of Jan. 13, 1945, as he was going through some of his father's possessions. The headline is "Sisson Missing." The brief story tells of Technical Sgt. James Roger Sisson who was serving with the 106th Infantry Division when he was declared missing on Dec. 21, 1944 during the Battle of the Bulge.

He was taken prisoner. His boots were taken. He suffered frostbite, which led to vascular damage which plagued him for a good part of his life.

He told his family how, as the war wound down, the guards at the camp became older as the younger ones were sent to the front. And he recalled the day when an American Jeep smashed through the camp's main gate. A soldier in crisp uniform jumped out, only to confront prisoners in rags on the edge of starvation.

There were small pieces, brief glimpses into a terrible time. There were long periods with no mention of the war at all. Sisson had business to tend to and politics to get involved in and a place to lay claim to in the life of Fall River and Somerset.

Now, as his family prepares to bury him tomorrow in Portsmouth, his birthplace, the things revealed in those family gatherings probably come as a surprise to many who knew J. Roger as a businessman and a state representative and a voice on the radio — a man of opinions with some stories to tell.

That seems so often the case. The obituaries tell us things we never knew, things kept private for years or shared only with members of the family. We read of the brutal war years and often find it hard to connect them with the people we knew.

Sisson was part owner of radio station WALE in Fall River, one of those stations that was so local you could almost smell the chourico cooking when you tuned it in. And he was not just an owner. He was on the air. He broadcast "The Somerset Story" from his kitchen in Somerset. His "Clothes Line Report" was real down-home listening.

In 1959, he led a walk from Fall River to Boston to bring attention to the plight of transit workers.

He smoked Camel non-filters until the day he died.

Sisson met Jacqueline Hamel at the Morton Middle School in Fall River. They were married for 64 years. When she died in May, he made it clear to his family he wanted to join her. He was 87 when he died Sept. 3.

"His ability to unconditionally love us, no matter what, that's what I'll remember," says Jay Sisson. "When we were growing up in the '60s and '70s, he was a staunch Republican living in the midst of raving anarchists."

He was a staunch Republican who hung that hand-carved wooden spoon on the wall. And that spoon told a story that had no politics in it at all.

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James D. West

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