

Appendix J

Presbytery of St. Augustine Memorial Resolution John Estill Thompson

(1924 - 2021)

Whereas the Rev. John Estill Thompson was born on November 11, 1924 and passed from this life on February 24, 2021, at the age of 96, in Charlottesville, Virginia, the Presbytery of St. Augustine gives thanks for his life and ministry with the following resolution:

John was born on his family's farm in the beautiful Thompson Valley, located in Tazewell County, Virginia, the third of four children born to the late William Archie Thompson and Alice Edmonia McGowan Thompson. After graduating at the top of his high school class in Tazewell County in southwest Virginia, John entered King College (now King University), the Presbyterian-affiliated school located in Bristol, Tennessee, with plans to become a Presbyterian minister. World War Two intervened, however, and John signed up to join the United States Navy at his local recruiting office.

He was trained at the torpedo school at Newport, Rhode Island, and was standing on the dock at Newport awaiting transfer to a naval destroyer to replace a torpedoman who had been killed in action, when orders arrived that he had been selected for the V-12 Navy College Training Program and he was to become a commissioned officer in the United States Navy. The Navy sent him through an accelerated three-year program at Hampden-Sydney College where he earned his BA in 1945. He then entered Princeton Theological Seminary, on track to become a Navy Chaplain.

With the end of World War Two in September 1945, John left active duty and became a member of the Navy Reserve. He married his wife Marion Elizabeth Martin Thompson in 1947, beginning a beautiful 67-year partnership. John transferred to Union Theological Seminary (now Union Presbyterian Seminary) and earned his Master of Divinity degree in 1948. He was ordained by Lexington Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church of the United States that year and began a life of service as a Presbyterian minister. In those days, he served churches in Franklin, West Virginia, and Crozet, Virginia. He was named the school chaplain and taught Latin and other subjects at the Miller School in Crozet, Virginia.

John was called back to active duty during the Korean War and served with Destroyer Squadron Nine in the West Pacific. It was during this time that John became one of the early pioneers of what would become known as the "Holy Helo" program, transferring chaplains from ship to ship by helicopter to hold religious services and provide chaplain care to the ships of the fleet. In the early 1950s, helicopters were a brand new technology and John would be lowered in a harness by rope from the helicopter to the deck of a ship as it rolled on the ocean's waves.

John returned to reserve status in 1955 and served as pastor of churches in Williamston, North Carolina (1955-1959), and Fernandina Beach, Florida (1959-1961).

John returned to active duty in 1961 and during the Cuban missile crisis he was assigned to the 2nd Marine Division and prepared to hit the beaches of Cuba with the Marines, an action that, thankfully, did not become necessary. In 1963, he shipped aboard the USS Hornet, an aircraft carrier in the Pacific Fleet, seeing service in the West Pacific off the coast of Vietnam. He served as base chaplain at the Hunter's Point Naval Shipyard in San Francisco, California, from 1966 to 1968. In 1968 he boarded the USS Intrepid, an aircraft carrier in the Atlantic Fleet, which was sent around the world to see duty off the coast of Vietnam in the West Pacific.

John finished his naval career as a senior chaplain at the Little Creek Amphibious Base in Norfolk, Virginia, and the Naval Regional Medical Center in Oakland, California. He retired in 1977, having earned promotion to the rank of Captain.

Following his retirement from military service, John served pastorates in five churches in four different presbyteries in both Virginia and Florida (McIntosh). His work during his post-Navy career helped these church congregations survive, thrive, and grow, and he considered this work among the most satisfying days of his nearly seven decades of service as an ordained Presbyterian minister.

John moved to Palmyra, Virginia in 1999, but he continued to attend presbytery meetings as often as he could, up to the age of 90. He was able to live completely independently and pain-free until one week before his death in the company of family at the Hospice of the Piedmont in Charlottesville.

By John's side and active in all his ministry service was his wife, Marion Elizabeth Martin Thompson, who preceded him in death. John and Marion raised three sons and became grandparents to six. John is survived by his sons, Russell Martin Thompson of Studio City, California; Timothy McGowan Thompson of Valencia, California; and Daniel Archie Thompson of Fork Union, Virginia; and six grandchildren.

We are grateful for John's life and his example of committed discipleship and joyful service. He will never know all of the people's lives that he touched, or the way that he touched them, but the Lord knows. We believe and affirm that The Lord who gave him life and so many opportunities to serve has greeted him with a loving embrace and with these words: "Well done, good and faithful servant."

This resolution is written with thanks to God Almighty and shall be placed in the minutes of the Spring Stated Meeting held on May 4, 2021.