

Ralph Pittman, Veteran Officer, Dies Saturday

Ralph Duncan Pittman passed away on Saturday, Nov. 4, 2017, at the age of 66.

Ralph was a lifelong servant, starting his career as a dispatcher at the North Wilkesboro Police Department at age 19 while still attending Wilkes Central High School. He worked third shift and attended school during the day. When he turned 21, he was sworn in as a police officer with the department and continued to work third shift, where he made several felony arrests for breaking and entering and larceny. He rotated to different shifts until he left the NWPD and enlisted in the U.S. Army, where he served approximately two years and returned to North Wilkesboro and the police department.

While in North Wilkesboro, Ralph was a member of the North Wilkesboro Fire Department and the Wilkes Rescue Squad. Ralph left the North Wilkesboro Police Department and was hired by the Lenoir Police Department, where he served approximately 17 years as a shift lieutenant. While at Lenoir, he was involved with responding to two riots, armed robberies, murders, numerous suicides and two hostage situations. One of the hostage situations involved a standoff at a shelter home for abused and battered women, with seven people being held against their will by an armed suspect. Ralph was instrumental in helping resolve the situation with no one being injured. He was awarded a medal for his actions in this event. The suspect was sentenced to 80 years in prison.

Ralph left the Lenoir Police Department and became a North Carolina probation/parole officer.

Ralph left probation and returned to North Wilkesboro after the death of mother, Elizabeth Duncan "Lib" Pittman. He once again went to work at the police department.

After a short time as a patrol officer, he was selected as an investigator with the department. He was later promoted to detective captain under the direction of Mayor Steve Foster. Ralph served in that capacity until his retirement.

During this time, he worked numerous child sex offense cases. He said after his retirement that this was one part of the job he was glad to walk away from. These cases are heart rending and take a toll on you after a while.

During this time, Ralph again became a member of the North Wilkesboro Fire Department, where he was an interior firefighter and a medical responder. He served the department until he retired.

Ralph was an active member of Boy Scout Troop 336, and was involved in scouting in one capacity or another since he was old enough to be a Cub Scout. Troop 336 is sponsored by North Wilkesboro Presbyterian Church. While serving with Troop 336, Ralph was awarded the Boy Scout Honor Medal with crossed palms (the highest-ranking lifesaving medal awarded by BSA) for saving a fellow firefighter at a silo fire at the old American Drew furniture building. This was only the 131st honor medal with crossed palms awarded in the nation. Ralph re-entered the burning silo to rescue fellow firefighter, Greg Fletcher and was credited with saving his life.

Ralph was also a graduate of the BSA Wood Badge course, which is an adult leadership course concentrating on outdoor skills. He attended this course in Atlanta, Ga.

While serving as a law enforcement officer, Ralph was involved with SWAT teams, both in Lenoir and North Wilkesboro. He was the SWAT team leader in Lenoir at one time. He was the SWAT team leader of an inter-agency SWAT team in North Wilkesboro under the administration of Chief David Pendry. Under Mr. Pendry's and Mr. Pittman's direction, numerous drug raids were carried out, ridding the city and county of numerous drug houses. Armed robbery suspects and other felony arrests were also carried out.

After Mr. Pendry retired, the SWAT team disbanded, but the county activated a Critical Response Team (CRT) under the administration of Sheriff Dane Mastin. Mr. Pittman became part of this group.

While serving on these teams, Mr. Pittman held positions as a sniper/observer and an entry team member. The CRT team took down armed robbery drug suspects and mental commitment subjects, along with murder suspects. Mr. Pittman was proud of the fact that no shots were ever fired by SWAT members and no SWAT member was ever shot.

Ralph was a graduate from TEES (a tactical explosive entry school), where he learned to use high explosives to breach doors and walls in order to gain quick access to barricaded suspects and to recognize improvised explosive devices.

Ralph was a law enforcement instructor with Wilkes Community College, where he taught law enforcement subjects for approximately 37 years. He taught Basic Law Enforcement Training courses, primarily concentrating on constitutional law and elements of criminal offenses. He also taught in-service training courses.

Ralph held an undergraduate degree in criminal justice from Appalachian State University and a master's degree in criminal justice from Boston University. He held an Advanced Law Enforcement Certificate from Criminal Justice Training and Standards and an Advanced Law Certificate from the Sheriff's Training and Standards. He was one of the few people in Wilkes to hold advanced certificates from both.

Ralph was a charter member of the James B. Gordon Camp of Surviving Sons of the Confederacy. Ralph's great-grandfather, J.G. Duncan, was a private in the Confederate Army from Wilkes County in the war for Southern independence.

Ralph was a member of a cowboy action-shooting club, the Gunpowder Creek Regulators, in Caldwell County. He got to dress up in period clothing, with two six guns, a lever-action rifle and a double-barrel shotgun and relive the adventures of the old west shooting on metal targets. He used to say, "I'm not much fast, but I sure do enjoy the re-enacting and shooting."

About law enforcement, he said, "I never made much money doing my duty, but I cannot think of anything else I would have rather done with my life than be a law enforcement officer." About his other "adventures" he said, "I have lived my childhood dreams. I always wanted to be a policeman, a fireman, a soldier and a 'cowboy.' I have done all these and so much more, and I am happy. Who could ask for more?"

Ralph was preceded in death by his mother, Elizabeth Duncan of North Wilkesboro.

Ralph is survived by his loving and devoted wife, Sherry Lynn Pittman of the home, whom Ralph loved dearly; a stepson, Josh Holt and his wife, Christy; and four grandchildren, Kyrstan, Lexi, Jon and Gaje.

The family wishes to especially thank his caregiver, Crystal Englebert.

Funeral services for Ralph will be held at 1 p.m. on Thursday, Nov. 9, 2017, at Reins-Sturdivant Chapel, with the Rev. Tim Henderson officiating. Burial will be in Mountlawn Memorial Park. The family will receive friends Wednesday, Nov. 8, 2017, from 6 until 8 p.m. at Reins-Sturdivant Funeral Home.

Pallbearers will be Cam Finley, Darrell Miller, Dane Mastin, Derek Wiles, Joe Rankin, Niki Hamby, Chris Hollers, Charles Hicks, Chris Shew, James Caldwell and Shannon Anderson. Flowers will be accepted.