



Thomas Johnson Wicker

September 9, 1932 - May 16, 2021

Thomas “Tom” Johnson Wicker, age 88, of New Market, TN, went home to heaven to live with God his Father and his Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ on Sunday, May 16, 2021. He died peacefully at home surrounded by his wife and family. He was born on September 9, 1932 In Schlater, Mississippi, and was preceded in death by his parents Herbert and Flavi Wicker, sister Bobby W. Sayle, and brother Herbert Wicker, Jr.

Tom was a loving husband, father, grandfather and great-grandfather. He is survived by his wife of 64 years, Sarah Wicker, of New Market, TN; sons Jay (Hyung Hi) Wicker, Ken (Lori) Wicker, Tim Wicker, and daughter Patti (Joe) Zuppa; nine grandchildren, Jennifer Wilson, Jason Clem, Julie Tallent, Sam Wicker, Anna Ashburn, Ben Wicker, Nathan Wicker, Eli Wicker, Robin Webster and their spouses; and eleven great-grandchildren. He is also survived by numerous nieces and nephews along with their children and grandchildren. He was a member of New Market Baptist Church where he served in the past as teacher and deacon. Tom loved God, his family, and flying.

An important part of Tom’s life was his service and love for his country. Because of his humility, many of his friends and acquaintances were not aware of his contribution and service through over 31 years of active duty in the US Air Force. Tom enlisted in the Air Force in 1951 and became an Air Force pilot in 1955 through the Aviation Cadet program. As an instructor, he taught pilots in the T-33A and F-86D. As the Cold War progressed, he next spent 3 years with the 525th Fighter Interceptor Squadron at Bitburg AFB,

Germany as an F-102A interceptor pilot. Subsequently, Tom served as an F-102A instructor pilot and later became the 5780th Air Defense Wing Chief for Standardization/Evaluation. As the United States became immersed in the Vietnam Conflict, he trained in reconnaissance. Flying the RF-4C, he completed 175 combat missions in Southeast Asia in 1969 with the 14th Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron (TRS) based in Thailand. Leaving Southeast Asia in 1970, he was assigned to the 30th TRS at RAF Alconbury where he served as a Flight Commander, Operations Officer, and Squadron Commander. After a short stint in the Air Ground Operations School as an instructor, Tom became the 1st Special Operations Wing (SOW) Deputy Commander for Operations in 1977. At that time he became a qualified MC-130E Combat Talon pilot. While serving as the 1st SOW Deputy Commander for Operations, the 20th SOS became the first special operations helicopter unit qualified for shipboard operations using the new technology of night vision goggles. The international scene again exploded in November of 1979 when militarized Iranian students seized the embassy in Tehran. He was initially deployed with and supported the AC-130H gunship Guam deployment from both the USS Midway and Guam. However, as strategy changed, he returned to Hurlburt Field in February 1980 and was involved in the 1st SOW follow-on training to rescue the hostages. He subsequently led the Hurlburt Field special operations contingent in the attempt to rescue the hostages in Iran. He was aboard the first MC-130E to land at Desert One during operation Eagle Claw where he remained as the C-130 commander. During this crisis and initially unbeknownst to him, he became the 1st SOW Vice Wing Commander. Based on his experience of combining the different branches of the US Armed Forces in special operations, Tom volunteered in 1981 to be the first Air Component commander for the newly formed Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC). As the first JSOC Air Component Commander, Tom helped to begin the process unifying the special operations components of the Navy, Marines, Army, and Air Force. He retired from active duty in 1982. During Tom's 31 years of military service, he piloted the T-6G, T-28A, T-38A,

T-33A, F- 86D, B-25N, F-102A, RF-4C, MC-130E, AC-130H, UH-1N, CH-3E, HH-53H, and Beach Baron. He received 2 Defense Superior Service Medals, Legion of Merit, Meritorious Service Medal, Distinguished Flying Cross, Air Medal with 12 oak leaf clusters, along with several other medals and ribbons. After retirement he continued to fly and instruct in civilian aviation.

If you have read this far and continue to be interested in Tom Wicker's life, the most important life-changing event occurred early in his Air Force career.

Quoting him from a veteran's occasion in 2009:

"...when I went to college, I did something that a lot of other people do. I found one of the bad aspects of college life. That was the wrong crowd. When it was apparent that I was not going to pass any course, I quit school and enlisted in the Air Force..."

Later, home for Christmas, "...I was also very proud to have a date with the homecoming queen (Sarah). One of the first questions she asked me...'Are you a Christian?' I said, 'Yes, I joined the church a long time ago.' Well, remember I said it was the thing to do?... in many conversations we had together, she said to read John. So, I began reading the book of John. Well it wasn't very long till after reading the Bible...that I realized that being a church member and being a Christian were not synonymous. On March 1st, 1956, I had an experience, where I had to eject out of an airplane that decided that it wanted to do its own thing and not fly anymore. So, hanging in that chute, the air was awfully quiet, the only noise was the gentle breeze blowing through the chute, I looked down below me to the fireball where the airplane had crashed...and I thought, you know, I just got saved (from the crash)...and I thought, you know, this is like salvation, how peaceful it is...No, I did not profess Christ at that moment, but later...I surrendered my life to Christ."

"Well, I mentioned the wrong crowd in college. Well...He (Christ) took away any desire for alcohol and cleaned up my mouth as well."

"...I could use many other exciting and similar things that happened during my career, but I have just given you an inkling...I mentioned them, not to lift up

myself, but to lift up my Savior. Was I perfect? No way was I perfect. I couldn't be that. I am not perfect today, but I grew each day then and I grow each day now."

The family of Thomas J. Wicker remains deeply grateful for this life changing experience, as it had a remarkable influence on them in many positive spiritual ways. From living with him, we understand his conclusion that 'no way was I perfect'; as we also know we are not perfect. Although not perfect in word or action, we were genuinely assured of his love for Jesus and his reliance on Christ for his deliverance from the eternal effects of sin. He desired that Christ be glorified.

In lieu of flowers, expressions of sympathy may be made in Tom's honor to Alliance Defending Freedom (adflegal.org) or to the charity close to your heart.

A memorial service will be held at New Market Baptist Church on Saturday June 19, 2021 at 10:30 AM. A private, family, military burial with honors will be held at the East Tennessee Veteran's Cemetery on Monday June 21, 2021.

Thanks to those who have helped in these final days: Smoky Mountain Hospice, Fielden Funeral Home, and many friends.

Cemetery Details

East Tennessee State Veterans Cemetery

2200 E. Governor John Sevier Hwy.
Knoxville, TN 37920

Previous Events

Memorial Service

JUN **19**. 10:30 AM (ET)

New Market Baptist Church
921 Churchview Street
New Market, TN 37820

Tribute Wall

JN

“ Is this the Thomas Wicker who provided a room for my wife Judith and I after we married and were being transferred from Perrin AFB to Keesler? It was a true blessing Jerry Norris

Jerry Norris - August 29, 2025 at 02:01 PM

DC

“ I was one of many lucky enough to serve under Col Wicker while he was Sq Commander of the 30th TRS at RAF Alconbury, Uk. While he was always in charge he treated all of us, enlisted or officers with respect. He did something really nice for me in 1971 that made a difference still today. I got to speak to him just maybe about 3 years ago and I'm so glad I did. To his family our belated prayers go out to you. Thank you for sharing him. Sincerely, Dan Curry dan30trs@gmail.com

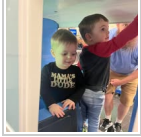
Dan Curry - February 04, 2022 at 11:02 PM

RR

“ Sorry for you're loss,, and wonderful amazing testimonial, being a Christian is what it's all about !! Thank God for people who Love the LORD . 🙏🙏🙏



Robin Rogers - May 25, 2021 at 07:56 PM



“ *I never met this gentleman. But I would like to thank him for what he did for his country. RIP sir.*



Loretta Woodard - May 19, 2021 at 08:08 PM