

Obituary for Maj Gen Thomas M. Sadler



A devoted champion of children in need and a decorated war veteran, Speedway Children's Charities (SCC) National Executive Director Emeritus and retired U.S. Air Force Maj. Gen. Thomas M. Sadler, 90, passed away peacefully on Monday in Mount Pleasant, South Carolina. Sadler bravely served his country for four decades then dedicated his life to serving children through Speedway Children's Charities for nearly 25 years.

"Gen. Sadler was an outstanding man, not just for the sacrifices he made in service to his country, but also for the dedication he had for Speedway Children's Charities," said O. Bruton Smith, executive chairman of Speedway Motorsports, Inc. and founder of Speedway Children's Charities. "I hired him a long time ago to grow our charity and to help children, and he did that every day he worked for me. Gen. Sadler often said, 'When you look into the eyes of a child in need, you're looking into the eyes of God.' He was incredibly dedicated to making a difference for kids who may not have been able to help themselves. General, you will be greatly missed."

A loving father and husband, Sadler was married to Mary Kenner Sadler, affectionately known as "Miss Ken," for 57 years before she passed away in 2008. Sadler is survived by his son, Tommy, and daughter-in-law, Penny.

Born in 1925, in Canton, Ohio, Sadler's family later moved to Montgomery, Alabama, where he graduated from high school in 1943. He earned a Bachelor of Science degree from Syracuse (New York) University in 1965, and a Master's Degree from The George Washington University, Washington, D.C., in 1970. He also completed Squadron Officer School at Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama, and the National War College, Fort Lesley J. McNair, Washington, D.C.

Sadler entered the Army Air Corps in August 1943 and was assigned in the European theater of operations as a B-17 nose gunner. He flew 35 combat missions with the 8th Air Force's 92nd Bombardment Group. He was discharged in December 1945 and attended the University of Alabama until August 1948.

Returning to active duty in October 1948, Sadler entered the aviation cadet program at Waco, Texas. He graduated from advanced flying school and was commissioned a second lieutenant in September 1949. From June 1950 to August 1951, Sadler served in South Korea where he flew 300 combat missions. He then returned to the 50th Troop Carrier Squadron at Sewart Air Force Base. In 1955, he transferred to Evreux Air Base, France, where he served with the 317th Troop Carrier Wing as commander of the 317th Tactical Command Post.

Sadler returned to Sewart Air Force Base in April 1959 where he served as a C-130 flight

commander with the 774th Troop Carrier Squadron. In May 1961, he transferred to Keesler Air Force Base, Mississippi, as an instructor in the Tactical Air Command Joint Air Ground Operations School. During the Cuban crisis in 1962, he was assigned to the Tactical Air Command advanced echelon at Homestead Air Force Base, Florida.

From December 1962 to January 1965, he was assigned to Headquarters Tactical Air Command at Langley Air Force Base, Virginia, as an operations staff officer. During 1965, he attended the University of Syracuse under the Bootstrap program. Following graduation in October 1965, Sadler again was assigned to the 317th Troop Carrier Wing, which was at Lockbourne Air Force Base, Ohio.

He traveled to the Republic of Vietnam in January 1966 and served for a year with the 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) as an air liaison officer and forward air controller, flying 0-1s. He spent another six months in the Republic of Vietnam as an air liaison officer with the 834th Air Division where he developed and organized the emergency airlift system and tactical airlift liaison officer operations for 7th Air Force.

In August 1967, Sadler was assigned to Headquarters U.S. Air Force, Washington, D.C., as chief of the Special Air Force Branch, Tactical and Airlift Forces Division, Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Plans and Operations. From July 1969 to July 1970, he was a student at the National War College. While there he also obtained his Master's Degree from The George Washington University. After graduation he returned to Lockbourne Air Force Base as vice commander of the 317th Tactical Airlift Wing.

Sadler transferred to Rhein-Main Air Base, Germany, in August 1971 as commander of the 322nd Tactical Airlift Wing until January 1974. He was then named commander of the 437th Military Airlift Wing at Charleston Air Force Base, South Carolina, where he remained until March 1975 when he became chief of security police at Air Force headquarters.

He was promoted to major general July 1, 1975, with date of rank Oct. 1, 1972.

Sadler retired from the U.S. Air Force on Oct. 1, 1983.

A command pilot with more than 9,360 flying hours, Sadler is credited with more than 400 combat missions in World War II, Korea and Southeast Asia. His military decorations and awards include the Distinguished Service Medal, Silver Star, Legion of Merit with oak leaf cluster, Distinguished Flying Cross with oak leaf cluster, Bronze Star Medal with two oak leaf clusters, Meritorious Service Medal, Air Medal with 15 oak leaf clusters, Air Force Commendation Medal, Purple Heart and the Italian Solidarity Star, 1st degree.

After 40 years of military service, Sadler turned his attention to serving the needs of children as the executive director of Speedway Children's Charities, a position he held from 1990 until 2014. The mission of Speedway Children's Charities remains true to the ideals it was founded upon in 1982: To care for children in educational, financial, social and medical need in order to help them lead productive lives.

Under his leadership, SCC expanded from one chapter to a national organization with local nonprofits based at each of the eight Speedway Motorsports, Inc. facilities across the United States. Under his guidance, SCC became one of the most recognized nonprofit organizations in the motorsports industry, raising funds for more than 500 children's organizations nationwide each year, impacting more than 300,000 needy children annually.

Since the organization was founded in 1982, Speedway Children's Charities has distributed more than \$43 million and made a difference in the lives of more than 13 million children across the United States.

The General's Final Victory Lap will be held at Calvary Church, 5801 Pineville-Mathews Road,

Charlotte, NC, on Monday, Sept. 14. Visitation is scheduled from 10:30 a.m. until 2:30 p.m., with the funeral to follow in the church at 3 p.m. Following the church service, The General will be taken in procession to Magnolia Memorial Gardens on the church grounds. There he will receive final military honors before his earthly remains are laid to rest next to his wife, Mary "Ken" Sadler who preceded him in death in July of 2008.

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