

Joseph Porterfield Johnson Sr.

August 3, 1924 - July 7, 2011

Joseph Porterfield Johnson Sr., 86, passed away on Thursday, July 7, 2011 at the Platte County Memorial Hospital in Wheatland, Wyoming. The funeral service was held at 10 a.m. Tuesday, July 12, 2011, at the Memorial Baptist Church. He will be buried at the family plot in the Wheatland Cemetery. A viewing was held at the Gorman Funeral Homes - Platte Chapel on Monday July 11th, 2011.

Joe was born on August 3, 1924 in Duncan, Oklahoma the son of William H. Johnson Sr. and Mattie (Jones) Johnson. He attended school at the Empire High School. He was especially active in 4-H and attended the National 4-H Congress in 1941. He purchased 160 acres of Oklahoma land when he was 16 and ranched for the rest of his life.

Upon graduation from high school, Joe joined the United States Army. He entered the military on August 3, 1943 - his birthday - and was honorably discharged on July 8, 1945. He served as a tail gunner on a B-24 Liberator, 13th Air Force, Pacific Theatre and flew 42 combat missions. After the war Joe was a member of the Wyoming National Guard. He was a 1st Lieutenant, Infantry (Tanks). Joe was very proud of his military service - he had every right to be.

After getting out of the military, he enrolled in college at Oklahoma A&M (now Oklahoma State University) graduating with a degree in animal science. This is where he met Clara Lou Rhodes who became the love of his life. They were married on November 2, 1947. In 1947 Joe and Clara Lou purchased their first ranch in Platte County, Wyoming and this was to be their home for the rest of his life.

Times were hard in the 1950s which required Joe to supplement his ranch income. He worked as a grease monkey for the highway department, a welder on the construction of the Platte County Memorial Hospital, and taught school. Meanwhile, he and Clara Lou started their family. After six kids they decided that was enough. Joe understood and made it clear to everyone that any success he had in business should be directly attributed to Clara Lou, his beloved wife.

Joe was twice named one of America's Outstanding Young Farmers. These awards specifically noted that in the 50's he managed his outfit during the worst price break in the history of the cattle industry and the worst drought in the history of Platte County.

He served as a member of the School, District #5 School Board, a member of the Platte County Fair Board, 20 years on the Soil Conservation Board (both local and state levels), organized a very successful 4-H club, was President of the Platte County 4-H Council, was a deacon at the Memorial Baptist Church for 43 years, and was named an honorary FFA member.

Water and Land development were his passions. For eight years he was the chairman of the Steering Committee for the Lower North Laramie Watershed group with end result being the Toltec Reservoir. In 1965 he received the National Wildlife Federation award as the Soil Conservationist of the year also in 1966 as the Water Conservationist of the year. Joe developed his agricultural land by drilling wells and putting in pivotal sprinklers. He continually strived to improve his land and cattle herd and was willing to change his operation as conditions required.

Joe and Clara's six kids actively participated in the family ranching business. He raised his workforce and was very proud of their accomplishments. He sought to leave them an inheritance. He wanted his children to learn to work together.

The youngest son Taylor passed away on September 29, 1977 and the oldest son Joe Jr. (Jody) passed away on April 12, 2002. The loss of these two sons took a heavy toll on the family.

Pallbearers are Art Perez Hernandez, John Harris, John Salazar, John Burns, Lee Alley, Herb Johnson, Doug Curtis, and Steve Sherard. These individual were selected because of their importance and contribution to the Johnson Family.

Joe is survived by his wife of 63 years, Clara Lou, son Richard (Bonnie), daughter Charlene, son Rex (Peggy) all of Wheatland, son Bob (Kathy) of Grosse Pointe Park, Michigan; nine grandchildren, Trey, Matt, Eydie, Shelley, Kevin, Brandon, Adam, Emily, Alex; three great grandchildren Stephen, Taylor Rae, Chloe; and one sister Lauranell Condrey of Irvine, California. He is predeceased by his parents and brothers Bill, Dave, and George.

A memorial to Military Family Assistance Fund, 6486 State Highway 92, Torrington, Wyoming 82240 would be appreciated by the family.

The Gorman Funeral Homes - Platte Chapel of Wheatland is in charge of the arrangements.

Condolences may be sent to the family at gormanfh.com.



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