

# Obituaries

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CAPT. GEORGE O'CONNELL JR., 96

## World War II vet had 'indomitable' spirit

**Serviceman noted for wide-ranging conversations.**

**Silver Stars, Bronze Stars among awards.**

By **Rick Badle**  
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At Lenbrook, a group of residents gathers daily at lunch or dinner to talk about everything from Iraq to the economy.

Capt. George O'Connell Jr., a World War II veteran called "Captain" or "Uncle George" by staff and friends at the retirement community, usually was among them. He embraced a global view of the world, said Chaplain Robbye Jarrell, the director of enrichment at the Buckhead facility.

"His spirit was indomitable," she said. "He loved what he did in the Navy, but he didn't live life looking in his rear-view mirror. Those conversations at lunch and dinner were a hallmark of who he was."

On Sunday, Capt. O'Connell died of natural causes at Lenbrook. He was 96. A memorial service will be held at 2 p.m. Monday at Lenbrook. A funeral Mass will be held at 9 a.m. Saturday at Sacred Heart of Jesus Catholic Church in Anniston, Ala. Gray Brown-Service Mortuary of Anniston is in charge of arrangements.

Born in Birmingham, Capt. O'Connell was a 1935 graduate of the U.S.



Capt. George O'Connell Jr. served in the Pacific, Atlantic and Mediterranean theaters in WWII. Lenbrook

Naval Academy. He was a professor at the U.S. Naval War College and the Armed Forces Staff College. He served in the Pacific, Atlantic and Mediterranean theaters during World War II. He also served in the Korean and Vietnam wars.

His was a military family. His father was a World War I Army surgeon. His grandfather and great-grandfather served in the military. And like him, two brothers, now deceased, took part in the Normandy invasion, said Mary Eleanor Vachon, a niece-in-law who lives in Atlanta.

"You would think he would have a warrior mentality, but he did not," she said. "It was an opportunity to serve, just like all of those you read about from the 'Greatest Generation.' He didn't

talk about his service, but if you got him started, he was a great storyteller."

Last Veterans Day, Capt. O'Connell was one of three soldiers profiled by The Atlanta Journal-Constitution. In that article, he talked about how he had aced both the U.S. Naval Academy and West Point entrance exams, about his years on battleships and the Battle of Guadalcanal. He was on Okinawa when the war ended.

He noted that he didn't think about World War II much.

"Luckily, God gives you a memory that you can blot out," he said at the time.

Capt. O'Connell spent 34 years in the military, 18 of them at sea. He received two Silver Stars and two Bronze Stars, among other awards, for his service.

After the military, he worked as a textile executive in Anniston. He was predeceased by his wife, Francys Galvin O'Connell, three sisters and two brothers.

At Lenbrook, a nephew broke the news to friends that Capt. O'Connell had passed. One resident retrieved two American flags and a picture of the ocean and the makeshift memorial was placed at a spot on the table where he usually sat.

"It was a soulful response to the death of their dear friend," Chaplain Jarrell said.

Survivors include several nieces, nephews and cousins.