



## James Kelly Whitaker

December 31, 1924 - August 4, 2011

Obituary Courtesy of The Orlando Sentinel

By Eloisa Ruano Gonzalez, Orlando Sentinel

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James Kelly Whitaker Sr.: Orlando fire vet found work 'a privilege'

James Kelly Whitaker, Sr. lived by three simple principles. Teach. Be a model. And pray.

As a wounded World War II veteran and a former assistant chief of the Orlando Fire Department, he was a model citizen dedicated to protecting his country. Whitaker, better known as Jay, also was a religious man who had served as a church deacon and elder.

He died Thursday in the home he built in 1951 for his wife in Orlando. He was 86 and had been battling cancer.

Whitaker taught his son, James Whitaker, Jr., and daughter, Kelly Whitaker, how to be a good Christian, spouse and parent, as well as how to work hard.

Even after he joined the Orlando Fire Department in 1950s, the elder Whitaker continued to work in the family's masonry business. On his days off from the fire department, he worked alongside his father and brother laying bricks, helping building thousands of new homes across Central Florida.

Whitaker believed it was a "privilege to go to work," said his son, who lives in Maitland. He continued to lay brick until he was 67, his son said.

"There is no way you could continue to do something that hard that long unless you loved it," Whitaker Jr., 52, said.

The second of seven children, he was born in Bristol, Va., but raised in nearby Kingsport, Tenn. A talented high school basketball player, according to his son, he received a sports scholarship to Tusculum College.

Drafted into the U.S. Army in his senior year of high school, he got to graduate, but couldn't make it to the ceremony.

He turned 19 while in combat at the siege of Bastogne during the Battle of the Bulge, his son said. Whitaker, who was later wounded in combat, received a Purple Heart and Bronze Star for his service.

After the war, he went to Tusculum for a year, but left to join his parents in Orlando, where they had recently moved, and help them start the business.

That's where he met his wife of 60 years, Marilyn Whitaker. Her father was an Orlando firefighter. He convinced Whitaker, a strong and disciplined military man, to join the fire department.

"He was going to be a cop or in the fire department. He wanted to serve the community," Whitaker Jr. said.

Whitaker quickly work his way to assistant fire chief. He was responsible of fire prevention and ensuring commercial buildings and public places were safe.

Although he missed fire-fighting, his son said he felt safer having an administrative role after he began to gradually lose his hearing. Blasts from the time he served in the war had damaged his hearing. He noticed it first in the 1960s.

He retired from the department in the 1970s. He continued to work in masonry until the '90s. With several grandchildren to take to the beach, as he had done with his own children any chance he had, Whitaker found retirement easy.

"He had no problem making the transition of just being a grandfather," his son said.

In addition to his son, survivors include his wife; brother, Benoris Whitaker, of Eustis; sisters Zella Saylor of Orlando, Doris Lilly of Maitland, Ann Hudnall of Leesburg, and Linda Davenport of Gainesville; seven grandchildren; and seven great-grandchildren, with three more on the way. His daughter died last year.

A service will be held Sunday, August 14 beginning at 2:00 PM at the First Presbyterian Church of Orlando.

Arrangements are entrusted to DeGusipe Funeral Home & Crematory 9001 N. Orlando Avenue, Maitland, Florida 32751, 407-695-CARE (2273). Please visit [www.degusipefuneralhome.com](http://www.degusipefuneralhome.com) to leave a special condolence.

# Tribute Wall



“ Our prayers are with you...  
God bless you, Marilyn, and all the family as you grieve Jay's  
passing  
and celebrate his life! Hope to see you Sunday.

We love you.##imported-begin##Bud & Jeanne Walker##imported-  
end##

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August 04, 2011 at 12:00 AM



“ So sorry to hear of your loss. I miss "Uncle" Jay. Love you  
much!##imported-begin##David Bookhardt##imported-end##

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August 04, 2011 at 12:00 AM