



## Russell Thayer III

December 5, 1922 - February 5, 2014

Russell Thayer, III

1922 – 2014

Former senior airline executive and decorated WW II pilot.

Russell Thayer III died in the company of his family in his home in Princeton, New Jersey on February 5th after a long and memorable life.

Thayer was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania on December 5, 1922 to Russell Thayer, Jr. and Shelby Wentworth Johnson Thayer.

As a child, Thayer attended Episcopal Academy in Merion, Pennsylvania. Then attended St. George's School in Newport, Rhode Island in 1942 where he played football, basketball and tennis. In the summers, he could be found sailing and racing speed boats on Upper Saranac Lake in the Adirondacks.

Determined to join the war effort, Thayer enlisted in the Army Air Corps immediately upon graduation from St. George's School. He took command of a B-26 Martin Marauder, the infamous bomber commonly known as the "Widow-maker," and later a P-47 Thunderbolt. Thayer flew 143 missions: 98 bomber sorties in the B-26 and 45 fighter sorties in the Thunderbolt. A member of the 9th Airforce, 323rd Bomb Group, 453rd Bomber Squadron, Thayer flew in combat missions in Europe before D-Day, in support of the D-

Day invasion and throughout the Battle of the Bulge. He was highly decorated for his performance as a pilot, Captain and later as Group Commander. Thayer was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross, 11 Air Medals, the Belgian Fourragere and numerous other service medals.

Following the war, Thayer attended Princeton University where he studied history and, again, rowed crew in the varsity 8-man shell. He also became a member of the Ivy Club. In June of 1947 he married Elizabeth "Lizzie" Dercum Mifflin of Haverford, Pennsylvania . They resided in the university housing known as "The Barracks". He graduated from Princeton in 1949: the day his first child, Elizabeth, was born.

With his abiding love for aviation, , Thayer embarked upon a life-long career in aviation, as an executive with Eastern Airlines , American Airlines and Seaboard World Airlines before becoming President, Chief Operating Officer, and Vice Chairman of the Board of Directors at Braniff International Airways. It was on his watch that the artist, Alexander Calder decorated the Braniff fleet and the attire of the flight attendants was designed by Emilio Pucci. Eventually, Thayer moved to Pan American Airlines as Senior Vice President of Operations. He was greatly respected among his peers in the airline industry and adored all aspects of aviation – his true passion. "If you do what you love, you will never work a day in your life," was his oft-repeated maxim.

Following the death of his first wife, Lizzie, in 1994, Thayer married Susan Stover Soderman Thayer in 1997. They shared many happy years together in Princeton. Thayer is survived by his wife, Susan; his five children: Elizabeth Thayer Verney, R. Dixon Thayer, Samuel M. Thayer, Shelby Thayer Saunders and David A. Thayer; eight grandchildren; and three great grandchildren and six stepchildren; John F. Soderman, Peter D. Soderman, Paul S. Soderman,

Sally Soderman Rabe, Jennifer Soderman Mahoney and Polly Soderman Avignone; and eight step-grandchildren. All will remember him with great affection.

A private funeral will be held at the Church of the Redeemer in Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania, followed by burial in the Churchyard.

In lieu of flowers, the family requests that donations be made to either Princeton Senior Resource Cntr.,45 Stockton St. Princeton, NJ 08540 or Princeton Hospice, c/o Princeton HealthCare System Foundation, 3626 US Route 1, Princeton, NJ 08540

# Tribute Wall

DG

“ Russ was first class. I learned a lot from him and enjoyed his wit and friendship.

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**Don Garvett** - February 10, 2014 at 09:28 PM

JS

“ Russell Thayer was 'Exhibit A' of the greatest generation. He fought in a war that changed the course of civilization, only to come home and become an extremely successful airline executive who also managed to raise a great family. I am so sorry for your loss. I am so thankful for the happiness he brought to my mother and siblings. My sister Jennifer said Russell was the father she never had. On a personal note I am very grateful for your father's generosity. On return trips to Princeton over the years my mother would say 'Your three nights at the Nassau Inn are paid for.' I knew only too well the accommodation offer had Russell's silent signature all over it....'silent' because he never ever called attention to his own kindness.

God Bless.

John, Dalva and Matthew Soderman

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**John Soderman** - February 10, 2014 at 01:16 AM

RN

During our mutual years as Seaboard World Airlines' officers, Russ and I shared memorable tasks, travels and tales. Our friendship endured well beyond those years, and there was never a more wonderful and selfless gentleman. May those qualities guide and inspire his family and friends for decades to come. I'll miss you, Russ.  
Bob Neff

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**Robert A. Neff** - May 05, 2015 at 09:17 AM