



Thomas Alison Gafford, Jr.

November 3, 1943 - April 10, 2025

Master Sergeant Thomas Alison Gafford, Jr., USMC (Ret.)
11th of November 1943 - 10th of April 2025

It is with profound sadness that we announce the passing of Master Sergeant Thomas Alison Gafford, Jr., USMC (Ret.), age 81, who passed away on the morning of April 10, 2025 following a catastrophic stroke.

Born on November 3, 1943, Tom lived a life marked by dedication, love, and service. A proud veteran of the United States Marine Corps, he served his country with distinction for 20 years of active duty. His commitment took him on two tours in Vietnam and to embassy duty across multiple continents, experiences that shaped his worldview and instilled in him a deep sense of patriotism.

In 1993, Tom found enduring love and happiness when he married Margaret on September 4th. Their union was a beautiful second chapter for both, and together they created a blended family of four children and nine grandchildren, all of whom he loved deeply and unconditionally. In 2000, Tom and Margaret built their dream home in Altavista, a place nestled on a picturesque hill that became the heart of their lives together.

Tom and Margaret traveled together extensively both for work and pleasure.

Among his favorite places to visit was Scotland, the family's ancestral home.

Tom was preceded in death by his beloved wife, Margaret, who passed away in October of 2022. While he will be deeply missed by his family and friends, they take comfort in knowing that he has been reunited with the love of his life.

He is survived by his children, Brian Early (Nikki), Allison Dunnigan (Terry), Olivia Fletcher (Eric), and Melinda Gafford, his grandchildren, and his doberman Ghillie. He will also be fondly remembered by the members of the Altavista Area YMCA, the Altavista Area Campbell County Habitat for Humanity, and everyone in the community who knew him.

A reception to celebrate Tom's life will be held at The Altavista Area YMCA on April 25, 2025 at 9am.

In lieu of flowers, please consider a donation to the Marine Corps Scholarship Fund, an organization near and dear to Tom's heart. <https://www.mcsf.org/donate/>

The family wishes to express their sincere gratitude for the outpouring of love and support during this difficult time.

Finch & Finch, Inc. Funeral & Cremation Service, Altavista is in charge of arrangements.

Previous Events

Reception

APR **25**. 9:00 AM (ET)

Altavista Area YMCA
718 7th Street
Altavista, VA 24517

Tribute Wall

RC

“ It is with great sadness that I have just found out about Toms' passing. I had the utmost pleasure and privileged to drive Tom around Scotland on two separate occasions. When I read the obituary it made me smile that Scotland was one of his favourite places to visit. It was always good to see him in the morning wearing his kilt and glengarry hat with pride. He walked with a swagger on those days, with many tourists asking to take his photograph.

I still smile at the last time I saw you in Scotland Tom. You turned back, we both stood to attention and we both saluted each other. A fantastic human being Tom.

Semper Fi Marine

Russell Carter - January 16 at 11:47 AM

KG

“ Kyle Goldsmith lit a candle in memory of Thomas Gafford



Kyle Goldsmith - July 20, 2025 at 10:13 PM

SH

“ *Semper Fidelis, Tom!*

Stanley Higgins - May 15, 2025 at 12:56 PM

JP

“ I met Tom Gafford while serving with him in Vietnam 1968. Tom was my Sargent in Kilo battery 4/13. It was an honor to have served with him. I have kept in touch with him with email and phone calls, I spoke to him about two months ago and planned on visiting with him soon. Tom is now at his new Duty station, guarding the Streets of Heaven along with other Marines.

Semper Fi

Joe Pizzi,

Joe Pizzi - May 09, 2025 at 11:22 AM

J(

“ Dear Tom, You will certainly be missed. You have been a part of our family for almost as long as I can remember. You were my role model, although I believe will always be striving to meet the mark you have set. Inside that rough big-brother Marine exterior was a beautiful person with a heart of gold. I can hardly find the words how much you have influenced mine and our families' lives. Rest well my brother. Love Jack.

Jack Gafford (Brother) - April 25, 2025 at 11:32 PM

HF

“ We were blessed to know Tom and Margaret through our daughter, Maria McCracken. When our grandson, Forster, was old enough to hunt, Tom offered his land and the use of his blind. Thank you, Tom, for being part of a young man’s future love of hunting.

When Tom learned that I knew how to make paella, after being stationed with the Air Force in Spain, he asked me to make it for them. He even ordered all the ingredients to be sure that it would be authentic. Over the years we had made sure to get together with them, and after Margaret’s passing, with Tom. I continued to cook for him when I was visiting the family. I was blessed to be able to visit with him at Christmas, at the Y and later to cook for him one last time.

Thank you, Tom for serving your country, a true patriot, and being a fierce and loyal friend.

Helene Forster - April 14, 2025 at 11:04 PM

DI

“ In 2005, I started to teach Tai Chi at the Y. Tom and Margaret were two of my first students. I started teaching Tai Chi so I could have some friends to do the Form with. Tom and Margaret became two of the best friends to share Tai Chi with and many other things. Over the 20 years since, Tom and I shared many memories together. His memories being much more fascinating than mine. I was grateful to sit and hear him tell story after story. He became the older brother that I never had and will truly miss. After the passing of Margaret, Tom shared that he had lost his best friend in the world. As much as I will miss Tom, he is reunited with his best friend and I cannot hold that against him. Tom modeled what it was to be a real man. Tough as nails, but compassionate for those he loved and his fellow man. Dare I say he was a true gentleman (sorry Tom don't mean to insult you). Fortunately, even though Tom leaves a hole in this world, he took the time and effort to make sure there were other men to take his place. Rest in peace brother! Until we see one another again.

David Inman - April 13, 2025 at 08:43 PM

KB

“ Over the years of going to the Altavista Y, I always enjoyed seeing Tom and Margaret. I had asked Tom about his wife a while back and he informed me of her passing and how much he missed her. I'm sad that he won't be at the gym anymore, but I also love that they're together again. My deepest sympathies to his family and friends.

Karen Blunk - April 13, 2025 at 08:42 PM

AL

“ *Semper Fi Marine to the end.*



Al Lester - April 12, 2025 at 05:25 PM

KW

“ *Kathy Walker lit a candle in memory of
Thomas Gafford*



Kathy Walker - April 12, 2025 at 02:48 PM

“ Olivia, Melinda, and Allison,

I want to express my deepest condolences on the passing of your dad. Tom was a truly great man, and it's impossible for me to fully convey the impact that he had on me as a person in the time that I was lucky enough to have known him. Outside of my own family, there's no one else more responsible for shaping me into the person I am today than Tom Gafford. Growing up, most of my family lived out-of-state, and Tom came to fill the role of grandfather for me - he taught me how to shoot and how to hunt, something I could only do once or twice a year with my actual grandfather and a passion I still carry forward into adulthood. He also taught me how to work with my hands, carry myself as a man, and not to take crap off of anyone. (He also taught me several very colorful phrases which I don't think I can repeat on this forum). Tom and Margaret opened their home to me and treated me as one of their own for as far back as I can remember, and I could never even begin to repay them for that generosity.

But more than just the lessons, he was so incredibly generous with his time. I spent a significant amount of time of my childhood at Tom and Margaret's house putting those lessons into practice by working on their land or spending hours in one of the blinds on their property during hunting season - often with my own grandfather who also considered Tom to be a great friend. Taking my first deer - an 8-point buck which hangs on the wall of the den behind me as I type this - on Tom's land remains the single most coveted and meaningful memory I have of both Tom and my own grandfather to this day. I will cherish that forever.

Despite all of this time spent around each other, I don't think Tom and I ever spoke a word in anger to each other over the course of our entire friendship - I was always happy to see him and talk to him. After moving away, a trip to Tom and Margaret's house was always the first thing on my to-do list upon coming home to Altavista and I always looked forward to it. I think I will miss those trips more

than I even realize now.

Tom, thank you for everything. Thanks for taking a bratty kid and molding him into a man. Thank you for telling me to “hurry the hell up and marry the damn girl”. Thank you for instilling in me a sense of pride, morality, and purpose. And thank you for being an indescribably great friend to me for as far back as I can remember. I will remember the lessons, the laughs, the generosity, and above all else, my friend Tom, for the rest of my life.

–Forster

Forster McCracken - April 12, 2025 at 09:56 AM

MM

“ *He was a dear friend of our family. Tom helped to shape my children to be the adults they are today. To know Tom was to be around a great, honorable, loving man. He lived an epic life and we feel so fortunate that we were able to know him and Margaret and have them celebrate many milestones with us, together. He will be missed deeply by the McCracken’s and their family members.*

maria mccracken - April 12, 2025 at 09:04 AM

CD

“ *CHRIS DALTON lit a candle in memory of Thomas Gafford*



CHRIS DALTON - April 11, 2025 at 04:12 PM