

Thomas Hamlin Reese, III, obituary



Tom Reese passed away June 23rd, 85 years after his birth in Shaker Heights, Ohio, 1939. Tom will be remembered for his very special character, big smile and enthusiastic support for his family, friends, and professional colleagues.

Tom exemplified the USAID officer of its early years. He joined USAID as a Management Intern in 1967. He came to USAID with a degree in economics from the University of Maryland and a two year stint with the US Army. As USAID sought to build up the technical expertise of its staff, it sent Tom to the University of Pittsburg for an advanced degree in economics and demography.

With that background, Tom and his growing family departed for Indonesia, 1972-1978. The 1970s was a decade of increased international focus on population issues, with concerns about rapid population growth and its impact on economic development, resource use, and health. Indonesia became a key focus of USAID's population efforts in Southeast Asia. Tom was particularly engaged with educational campaigns to raise awareness about the benefits of smaller family sizes, contraceptive use, and maternal and child health - as well as demographic studies.

The USAID-backed programs had a significant impact on reducing Indonesia's population growth rate. By the end of the 1970s, family planning had become a key element of Indonesian development policy. The population growth rate fell from about 2.3 percent annually in the 1970s to about 1.7 percent by the 1990s. The program is recognized as a model for other developing countries, demonstrating the effectiveness of government commitment combined with international support in achieving demographic transitions. Tom was one of a distinguished group of USAID officers and collaborators responsible for this success.

Tom followed his time in Indonesia with an assignment to Egypt in 1979 where he continued his work in the area of population and demography. Recognizing Tom's growing managerial skill set, USAID appointed Tom as Director of Food for Peace in 1983. Food for Peace was a significant program addressing urgent food crises, but with Tom's insight, encouragement, and bureaucratic savvy, it began to take on a larger significance within USAID as an important actor in promoting long-term development goals.

At this point, Tom moved into increasingly responsible positions at USAID, Director of the Office for Northern Africa in Washington and then Director of the USAID Mission in Bangkok, Thailand. There Tom joined a forward looking set of USAID colleagues seeking to link local strengths in areas of science and technology with private sector finance and initiative in the Asia region and with the United States. Tom then retired from USAID in 1992 with the rank of Minister Counselor in the US Senior Foreign Service.

A note on some of Tom's enthusiasms. He was an avid runner - participating in marathons in Athens, Greece and in Egypt itself, barefoot. He was an adventure traveler, one of his great stories concerning what turned into a dangerous trek at Mount Sinai. And, of course, no remembrance of Tom should leave out his passion for the Washington Redskins, and especially the Super Bowl Victory in 1988

In retirement Tom worked with the University of North Carolina Kenan-Flagler School of Business on partnerships and projects across Southeast Asia. He relocated to Flagstaff, Arizona where he lived until his death in June. His sons, Tom and Glenn, are fathers to the four grandchildren Tom loved so much.