

DAILY REPORT

A SMART READ FOR SMART READERS

Camp reflects on career in the law

JUDGE LOOKS FORWARD

to hearing fewer cases, going back to farming and his interest in history

BY R. ROBIN MCDONALD

JACK T. CAMP, the 65-year-old chief judge of Georgia's Northern District, said that when he becomes a senior judge on Jan. 1, he knows what he wants to do. "I want to farm a little," he said.

Camp grew up on a working farm in Moreland, a few miles from Newnan, that had been in his family more than a century. He still owns a 500-acre farm in Coweta County near Chattahoochee Bend State Park. That farm, like the one where he grew up, was a working cattle farm "until my son left to go to college," the judge said in an interview with the *Daily Report* about his career as a lawyer and a jurist. "He was my best hand."

Camp, President Ronald Reagan's last appointment to the federal bench, completed his 20th year as a federal judge in June. After he turned 65 in October, Camp notified President Bush that on Dec. 31 he would take senior status—a form of semiretirement that permits a federal judge, beginning at age 65 and after 15 years of active service, to work a less strenuous schedule while maintaining an office and staff. Judges with senior status no longer hold a formal seat on the bench and are replaced with new appointments. Camp also will step down as chief judge, a post he has held since Sept. 1, 2006.

Camp, who presides over all cases at the federal courthouse in Newnan and also hears cases in Atlanta, said he intends to spend most of his time as a senior judge in Newnan and hear cases

three or four days a week. "I hope I'll have most of my cases in Newnan," he said.

Born in Newnan, Camp has lived in the Coweta County community much of his life, practiced law there before he was appointed to the bench, brought his young wife there, raised his children there, and speaks of the town often and with great affection.

Taking senior status, he said, will give him the opportunity to do some things "I really want to do, but never had a chance to do."

Like farming. And restoring antique tractors, of which he has a dozen or so, all in need of work. He also hopes to couple his love of working the land with his passion for history, which he described as "my first love." Camp said he would like to research changes in Georgia's agriculture, particularly in the county where he lives.

He recalls that cotton was still grown in Middle Georgia until the onset of the Great Depression, when—after the ravages of the boll weevil—cotton crops were replaced with peaches. He remembers harvesting peaches as a boy when his family, which also raised cattle, maintained 200 acres in peach trees. But after World War II, when the first planting of peach trees—which have a life span of 25 to 35 years—matured and then began to die, Camp said growers in his county didn't replace them.

Before he begins farming again in earnest, the judge said he also intends to research "something I can grow, maybe an orchard. ... It's a great pleasure to me to see things grow. You arrange your time and schedule by the sun and weather."

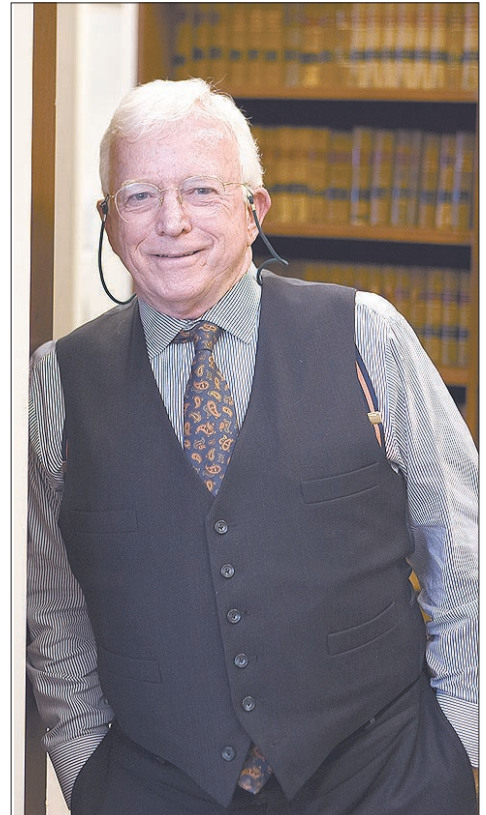
Camp didn't always aspire to be a lawyer, or a federal judge. When he was a teen, he contemplated a military career, and in 1961 he enrolled in The Citadel in South Carolina. "I really, really liked Charleston," he said. "I had a very, very good education. It was good for me. The discipline forced some focus on me."

Upon graduation, Camp won a Ford Foundation fellowship to study history at the University of Virginia, where he earned an M.A. in history before joining the U.S. Army as a lieutenant and then going to Vietnam.

"I liked history. It was my first love," Camp said. "I enjoyed history more than law school."

He arrived in Vietnam in 1968, shortly after the Tet offensive, and was assigned to military intelligence. He spent the first part of his tour in the interrogation section and the second part in visual reconnaissance that often involved patrolling the Ho Chi Minh Trail (the major north-south route for the North Vietnamese armies) from the air.

"It was an exciting tour," Camp recalled. "I



ZACHARY D. PORTER/DAILY REPORT

Judge Jack Camp says his generation was influenced to enter the law by "To Kill a Mockingbird."

U.S. District Judge Jack T. Camp

Appointed to the U.S. District Court for the Northern District by President Ronald Reagan in 1988 after practicing at Glover & Davis in Newnan from 1975 to 1988.

Undergraduate degree, The Citadel, 1965; M.A., history, University of Virginia, 1967

J.D., University of Virginia, 1973

never would have volunteered for Vietnam. But it was the event of my generation," the judge said, and, as such, he has never regretted his service there. Several years ago, he and an old Army buddy returned to Vietnam, perhaps, Camp said, "to relive a little of our youth. You don't see a country when you're in the military. We wanted to go back to those places we had been when we

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Camp reflects on his legal career, prepares to cut back on duties

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were very young.”

When Camp returned from the war in 1969, he went back to UVA, this time to law school. While history remained his first love, job prospects in that field weren't abundant. At the same time, the status of the legal profession was high, and Camp noted that television programs and movies contributed to the aura of lawyers.

“I really do believe more members of my generation went to law school because of ‘To Kill a Mockingbird,’”—the movie based on Harper Lee's book starring Gregory Peck as the highly principled lawyer Atticus Finch, Camp said. “It came out while I was in college.”

Camp acknowledged that the movie may have influenced him as well. “I was maybe a little bit naïve about the practice of law,” he said. “But I always liked lawyers in Newnan I had known. I thought it would be a relevant way to make a living.”

At the time, entering the law was still considered something of a public service, he said. “It was a profession in the truest sense. ... I knew I could use that position to help my community. And that was attractive to me.” He earned his J.D. in 1973. Camp returned to Newnan with a new wife, who had grown up near Chicago and whom he had met while she was at Sweet Briar College near UGA. He and J. Littleton “Lit” Glover Jr., a friend from Newnan who had gone to law school with him, joined Glover's father's law firm, Glover & Davis. “We had a good practice, I think,” Camp said. “We knew all the lawyers. We knew all the judges. ... I had good clients who always paid.”

It was a far cry from life on the federal bench, which Camp described as “really kind of isolated.”

Camp said he also enjoyed serving as an appointed public defender in indigent criminal cases, including some murder cases. “Some of my best memories are of those appointed cases,” he recalled.

Camp remembered winning a jury acquittal in Pike County of a client who had shot and killed someone. While he was sitting at the counsel table after the verdict had been rendered, the widow of the dead man suddenly came down the courtroom aisle, pushed past the bar, waving a large butcher knife. “She was coming after my client,” Camp recalled. “But I was between my client and her.” The assistant district attorney tackled her less than five feet from Camp.

He said he got a call a short time later from the local prosecutor telling him that, “if you don't mind,” he intended to drop charges against the widow, adding, “This woman was just upset.”

Noted the judge, “That wouldn't happen in federal court.”

When Camp was nearing 45, U.S. District Judge Charles A. Moye Jr., who still regularly hears cases in Atlanta, announced he was taking senior status. Camp, who had never been a judge nor active in local politics, had a successful legal

practice. But Camp said he was restless to try something new. After he read of Moye's pending retirement, Camp said his law partners “talked me into” applying for the job. At the time, one of his partners was John Stuckey, then the state chairman of the Republican Party. “He vouched for my party credentials,” the judge said. “I had never been active in party politics.”

Georgia's U.S. senators, Sam Nunn and Wyche Fowler, both of whom Camp knew, also vouched for him. After Camp was nominated, Fowler introduced him to the Senate Judiciary Committee.

That fall, after a series of contentious hearings, the Senate rejected Reagan's U.S. Supreme Court nomination of Robert H. Bork, then a judge on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit. By the time Camp appeared before the Senate Judiciary Committee, it was near the end of Reagan's second term and the Senate had failed to confirm 35 of his judicial nominees.

But with the support of both of Georgia's Democratic senators and U.S. Sen. Strom Thurmond of South Carolina, then the ranking Republican on the Judiciary Committee, Camp said his nomination was approved. Thurmond backed Camp because he was a Citadel graduate, the judge recalled, telling the Senate committee, “All you need to know about this next man is that he graduated from the finest military institution in the country.”

Camp said that a “very liberal” friend of his who attended the hearing with him leaned over to him and said in a stage whisper, “Hasn't he ever heard of West Point?”

Camp was confirmed by the Senate in March 1988 and sworn in the following June. He acknowledged that at the time, because he had never been a judge, “There were a lot of things you don't know.” But he added, “You do have a lot more sympathy with the trial attorneys” on both sides of the aisle “because you understand the problems.”

Shortly after he was sworn in, colleague U.S. District Judge G. Ernest Tidwell, who was then presiding in Newnan, informed Camp that he had no intention of relinquishing that post just because Camp was a Newnan resident, adding conspiratorially, “You know, the lawyers treat you better in Newnan.”

So Camp spent his first seven or eight years as a judge in Atlanta. Because he still knew so many of the lawyers practicing at the Newnan courthouse, sitting on the bench in Atlanta “was a much better way to learn how to be a judge,” Camp said. “It was probably the best thing for me.”

But Camp said that one day, after Tidwell's son had completed his clerkship with then-U.S. 11th Circuit Senior Judge Lewis Rander “Pete” Morgan, who maintained an office in the Newnan courthouse, Judge Tidwell generously offered to turn the Newnan courthouse over to Camp. Tidwell remains on the bench in Atlanta.

Camp has presided over his share of fascinating cases. In 1995 he issued a temporary stay of execution for convicted killer Larry Lonchar two hours before he was to die. Lonchar claimed he wanted to be executed but contended that he wanted to die by lethal injection, not in the electric chair, in order to preserve his organs for donation. The stay was later overturned by the 11th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals.

More recently, Camp sentenced former Geor-

gia legislator Ron Sailor Jr. to five years in prison on charges that he offered to launder money for a man he believed to be a drug dealer and defrauded the church where he was once a pastor.

Camp has handled several voting rights cases and in October sat on a three-judge panel with colleagues U.S. District Judge William S. Duffey Jr. and 11th U.S. Circuit Judge Stanley F. Birch Jr. on a request for an injunction against Georgia's secretary of state.

The case centered on Secretary of State Karen Handel's decision to purge voter lists statewide and her notice to more than 50,000 registered voters that they were potentially ineligible to vote. The panel decided that voters flagged as potentially ineligible by Handel's office still could vote in the Nov. 4 election but would have to use a challenged ballot.

One case that remains among the most significant Camp has overseen is the case against Melvin D. Walker and David I. Ramsey, who were charged with joining in the December 2000 assassination of De Kalb County Sheriff-elect Derwin Brown.

DeKalb Sheriff Sidney Dorsey, whom Brown had beaten in a runoff election in the fall of 2000, was eventually convicted of arranging Brown's murder. Walker, a deputy and former Marine sharpshooter, had been identified as the triggerman who pumped 12 bullets into Brown. Ramsey was identified as one of the backup shooters at the scene.

After a DeKalb jury acquitted Walker and Ramsey of Brown's murder in 2002, federal prosecutors launched their own investigation, securing a grand jury indictment in 2004 charging the two men with using interstate communications—cell phones—to facilitate Brown's murder. Camp sentenced the two men to serve life without parole.

Camp said that the U.S. Justice Department attorney who tried the case, Bobbi Bernstein, was among the best lawyers he has ever seen in a courtroom.

He also recalled the case against former professional wrestler “Hardbody” Harrison Norris, whom Camp sentenced to life after he was tried on charges that included forced labor, sex trafficking, peonage, aggravated sexual assault, witness tampering and obstruction of justice.

Norris lured women—many of them homeless, drug addicts or on the run from law enforcement authorities—to his home, promising to train them as professional wrestlers but instead using them as prostitutes.

When Camp sentenced Norris, he told him that while his victims “weren't tied, chained or kept in the basement,” he controlled them psychologically, according to an account of Harrison's sentencing in *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*. “Quite frankly,” Camp said, “You seem to have a better understanding of psychology than most psychologists I've known.”

Camp called the case a sad one, although he said it had its comical moments as Norris, a showman who used to wrestle for Turner Broadcasting System's World Championship Wrestling, defended himself and made his own closing argument. “He was a really bright man,” said the judge. **DR**

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