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## OBITUARIES

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# John L. Smith, Ex-Chief Judge Of U.S. District Court, Dies

By Richard Pearson  
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John Lewis Smith Jr., 79, a retired chief judge of the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia and former chief judge of the D.C. Court of General Sessions, died Sept. 4 at George Washington University Hospital. He had pneumonia.

In 1956, he was appointed to D.C. Municipal Court, which later became the Court of General Sessions, and, finally, D.C. Superior Court. He became chief judge shortly after his appointment and held that post until he was named to U.S. District Court in 1966. He was chief judge of that court from 1981 until shortly before taking senior judge status in January 1983. From 1982 to 1988, he was presiding judge of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court.

Over the years, Judge Smith had presided over several notable cases in local and federal courts. Cases ranged from murder trials to one in which he ruled that the Nixon administration had illegally wiretapped the private home of National Security Council staff member Morton Halperin.

He also had presided over legal clashes involving Washington figures and institutions such as Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Anne Gorsuch and Congress and Secretary of State Alexander M. Haig Jr. and The Washington Post. Of less historic note nationally, though of great importance to Washingtonians in general, he also ruled on traffic enforcement operations and on the disposal of sewage.

In a 1966 editorial, The Post

hailed his promotion to U.S. District Court, writing that Judge Smith "has richly merited his promotion to the District bench. He is a conscientious and hard-working judge with a broad knowledge of the law and a judicial temperament."

In 1966, Post court reporter Leonard Downie Jr., now the paper's executive editor, wrote that Judge Smith had "an unusually high reputation for fairness" and was considered by many veteran General Sessions Court observers to be "one of the city's finest judges."

Judge Smith, a native and resident of Washington, attained the rank of Army lieutenant colonel while serving in the Mediterranean theater during World War II. He was a 1935 *cum laude* graduate of Princeton University and a 1938 graduate of Georgetown University Law School, where he received a master's degree in tax law in 1939.

Before his elevation to the bench, he practiced criminal and civil law in Washington. He was an assistant U.S. attorney for the District from 1940 to 1946 and served on the D.C. Public Utilities Commission in 1956.

Judge Smith was a member of the Judicial Conference Committee on the Administration of the Federal Magistrates System from 1973 to 1982, and he was appointed to the Judicial Conference of the United States in 1981.