Obituary for Hon. Charles W. Joiner  
Date of passing: March 10, 2017

Charles Wycliffe Joiner, United States Federal District Judge, was born February 14, 1916, in Maquoketa, Iowa. He passed away peacefully at his home in Naples, Florida, on March 10, 2017, at the age of 101. He was the son of Mary von Schrader Joiner and Melvin William Joiner. He married Anna Helen Martin in 1939, in Des Moines, Iowa. Throughout their happy 72-year marriage, they lived in Des Moines, raised their family in Ann Arbor, Michigan, and for the last 40 years resided at Moorings Park Retirement Community in Naples, Florida. Here, Charles enjoyed a round of golf almost every day until he was 96. He was preceded in death by his parents, his sisters Margaret Lozier and Charlotte Child, his brother Otis Joiner, and recently his daughter-in-law, Carol Joiner. He is survived by three children: Charles Jr. (Katherine) of Greenville, SC; Nancy (Stan) Bidlack of Pinckney, MI; Richard of Madisonville, KY; seven grandchildren, and fourteen great-grandchildren.

Judge Joiner attended the University of Iowa, receiving his B.A., followed by a J.D. from the university’s Law School in 1939.

He served his country in the Army Air Corps of World War II, volunteering as an Aviation Cadet, becoming a flight instructor, then pilot and crew commander of a B-29 bomber squadron in the Pacific. Judge Joiner’s professional career spanned the breadth of the legal profession. Admitted to the Iowa bar in 1939, he practiced in Des Moines as a trial attorney with the firm of Miller, Huebner, and Miller until 1947. During this time he was elected president of the Polk County Junior Bar Association, where he initiated and led Des Moines’ effort to reduce smoke and smog, as Chairman of the Smoke Abatement Commission — decades ahead of environmental concerns, and earning him a nickname around town: “Smokin’ Charley.” In addition, he worked as a law teacher, researcher, legal draftsman, and writer.

In 1947, Charles was admitted to the Michigan Bar, and he and Ann moved to Ann Arbor where he became active in both Rotary and city government. He was elected alderman, serving on City Council, 1955-59.

In the early 1960s Charles promoted, organized, and directed a group of lawyers in drafting an unprecedented complete revision of the 40-year-old Procedural Statutes and Rules for Michigan’s state courts, then led the successful drive for their enactment. For the State of Michigan’s Constitutional Convention of 1961-62, he served as a director for the Preparatory Commission, as well as the Convention’s director of Research and Drafting.

Charles’ growing reputation as a legal scholar resulted in attracting the attention of the Chief Justice of the United States, and in 1965 the Hon. Earl Warren tapped him to help author the historic proposal that resulted in the Uniform Rules of Evidence for the Federal Court system, and Charles helped advocate throughout the United States for its adoption. He served as one of the drafters of the rules, then as a leader in promoting and teaching them. Later, Charles was again recruited by the Chief Justice — this time to serve on the Civil Rules Advisory Committee, the Standing Committee on Civil Rules of the Judicial Conference, and the Committee to review Circuit Council Conduct and Disability Orders (Ethics). For nine years, he sat on the Committee on Ethics of the American Bar Association. As a member, and later chair of the A.B.A.’s Committee on Specialization, he promoted active examination of, and solutions to, problems inherent in specialization within the profession. In addition to his several roles with the A.B.A., he was a member of the State Bar of Michigan and served as its president, 1970-77. As chair of the Bar’s Privacy Committee, he organized and directed that group’s ground-breaking
innovations in privacy protection. He was a Life Member of the NAACP.

Charles’ long-time passion for good law further resulted in being named by Governor William G. Milliken in 1973 as a Michigan Commissioner of Uniform State Laws. There he helped draft and promote numerous initiatives designed to make the laws of Michigan more consistent and clear.

At the University of Michigan Law School, he taught as a Professor of Law, later serving as Associate Dean, then the school’s Acting Dean, until he was appointed Dean of Wayne State University Law School in 1967. He served as Wayne Law’s Dean until his appointment to the federal bench in 1972 — as a District Judge for the Eastern District of Michigan.

Judge Joiner was a gifted legal scholar and author of six books and, as a law teacher and Dean, he had a passion for designing innovative teaching materials. While a professor at Michigan, he developed a teaching method that was original and exciting at the time — filming a series of faux accidents from different angles to be used in moot courts in law schools around the country. Among his published works are Trials and Appeals; Civil Justice and the Jury; Introduction to Civil Procedure; and Jurisdiction and Judgments. He wrote prolifically throughout his career; his work was published in numerous law reviews and bar journals. He was also an active member of the American Law Institute; the American Judicature Society, serving on its Board of Directors, 1962-65; and the American Bar Foundation, where he served as Chair of the Fellows, 1978-79.

Throughout his life Judge Joiner had an abiding interest in continuing legal education. He was a prime mover of the first national effort to provide a program of continuing education for lawyers returning home after the War. He also believed that the established bar had developed a limited interest in law students, thus he organized and promoted the American Law Student Association as a part of the A.B.A. Later, at the University of Michigan, he created the Advocacy Institute for Continuing Education for lawyers.

On the Federal Bench, the Judge heard and decided a number of significant and landmark cases, both civil and criminal. Among these were some of the first cases involving the use of polygraph technology in the federal system. He oversaw the elimination in Michigan of large state institutions for the severely disabled and the creation of more humane and effective smaller group homes. In a case that examined the reasons that some young African American children in Ann Arbor were not learning to read, he held that the school board, the school principals, and the teachers had to learn more about the history and elements of the English language — dialects, grammars, syntax, and vernaculars — and then use that knowledge in educating students. By understanding more about these linguistic elements and how they related to the children’s lives and language, the schools could better teach them “Standard English.”

Judge Joiner sat actively as a Federal District Judge in Detroit and Ann Arbor until he took Senior Status in 1984. From then until 1997, he sat by invitation on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 6th Judicial Circuit, hearing about one-third load. After that, the Judge began full retirement. In 2016, at the age of 100, the Judge was inducted into Wayne State University Law School’s inaugural Wall of Fame class as one of thirteen distinguished alumni and staff.

Charles W. Joiner had a fascinating career as well as a long, interesting lifetime. Throughout, he strove to help make the legal profession and the law responsible and relevant in citizens’ lives. Over these many years, Judge Joiner was interested in the people and things around him and throughout the world. He loved his children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. For all of us, he was an expert advice-
giver — rarely offering unless asked, and his advice was always meaningful and usually gratefully taken. He especially loved the games people play — baseball, football, basketball...and bridge. But his favorite personal pastime was golf. He loved it and played it very well. He was proud of three Club Championships: first as a young man, in Maquoketa; then in middle-age, in Ann Arbor; and finally in his 70s, in Naples. The Judge “shot his age” for the first time when he was 68, and he did so, at least once every year until he was 96, an extraordinary achievement in golf. He and Ann loved traveling to interesting places in the world — often generously sharing such adventures with their children — and meeting different people and cultures. They enjoyed nature, new spring flowers, the migrating birds, and the greenness of the grass each spring. Before he died, the Judge said, “I will miss you all and the way you interact, and play, and the beauty that is everywhere.” Charles Joiner’s family and friends will miss him, as well.

The Memorial Service for Charles Joiner will be held at 11:00AM, Friday, March 17, 2017, in Bower Chapel, 120 Moorings Park Drive, Naples, FL 34105. Memorial contributions may be made to North Methodist Church of Naples, 6000 Goodlette-Frank Rd., Naples, FL 34109, or a charity of choice.