

Inducted November 29, 2016



Eugene Patterson

Eugene Patterson was born in Valdosta, Georgia. His father worked at a local bank, but when it closed during the Great Depression, the family moved to Adel, Georgia, where Patterson began work at the Adel News as a teenager.

Patterson rose from Depression-poor south Georgia, graduated from the University of Georgia, fought bravely with General Patton's Third Army in World War II, and reached journalism's seats of power at The Atlanta Constitution, The Washington Post, The St. Petersburg Times and The Poynter Institute.

As managing editor of the Post, Patterson helped convince Publisher Katherine Graham to publish the Pentagon Papers.

It was his work as editor and columnist at the Constitution, writing a signed column seven days a week for eight years, from 1960 to 1968, that earned him a Pulitzer Prize for Editorial Writing in 1967. His columns exposed those who were fighting against the civil rights movement, supported those who bled and died for it and, as a result, put his own life and his families' lives at risk.

The column he wrote on Sunday, September 15, 1963, the day four children were murdered in the Birmingham church bombing, called "A Flower for the Graves," stands as one of the most powerful calls for changed hearts and changed minds across the South and the rest of the nation — a column for all times, a beacon — in the history of civil rights journalism.

As Robert McFadden of The New York Times wrote, "In 41 years as a reporter, editor and news executive, Mr. Patterson... was one of America's most highly regarded journalists — a plain-talking, hard-driving competitor known for fairness and integrity as the nation confronted racial turmoil, divisions over the Vietnam War and new ethical challenges in journalism."

Patterson died in 2013 at the age of 89.