

Starvation in the Orient made him realize his love for agriculture

His dream had been to become a civil engineer — to build highways and bridges.

At North Carolina State University, he was a cadet colonel in the ROTC when World War II came along.

He opted to join the Navy and a sight he witnessed in the Orient completely changed the direction of his life.

He was 21 and standing on the deck of a ship when he saw bodies floating down the river.

They hadn't been killed in the war; they had starved to death. It was at that moment that Norfleet L. Sugg of Pinetops realized that his interest was in food — in agriculture and farms.

"It was like a Christian call to me," says the executive director of the North Carolina Peanut Growers Association (NCPGA), "I have a deep commitment to agriculture. It is a real honor for me to work with a food commodity like peanuts to fulfill my personal objective."

Now, after a lifetime devoted to agriculture, including his current term as chairman of the National Peanut Council, his primary career is winding down and he's getting ready to change directions.

Sugg says he plans to complete his term as chairman of the national group and this means a year as immediate past president also will keep him busy.

When that commitment has been completed, Sugg says, he plans to retire and change directions.

Sugg's career in agriculture began when he received his bachelor's degree in agronomy from NCSU in 1948.

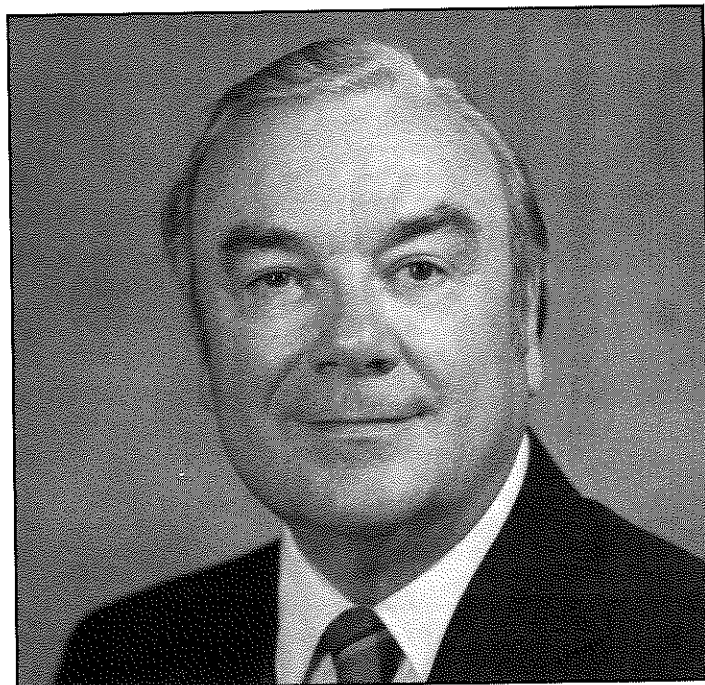
Since that time, he has held such positions as president of the Agrochemical Division of Planters National Bank & Trust Co. in Rocky Mount and executive vice president of the North Carolina Agribusiness Council.

He has headed the Peanut Growers Association since 1980.

Over the years he has been widely recognized for his work in agriculture.

Honors received by Sugg include the annual achievement award for education, presented by the Soil Science Society; membership in Gamma Sigma Delta, the honor society of agriculture; a state award from the North Carolina County Agents Association; the state honorary FFA degree; the national American FFA degree; a meritorious service award from the NCSU Alumnus Association; and the distinguished alumnus award from the NCSU College of Agriculture & Life Sciences, to name just a few.

He has served as chairman of the Agriculture Council of America, the Agriculture Committee of the North Carolina Bankers Association and the Virginia-Carolina Peanut Advisory



Norfleet L. Sugg

Committee.

He has been president of the NCSU Alumni Association, the Soil Science Society of North Carolina, the Coastal Plain Planning and Development Commission, the 1970 Tobacco Growers Trade Fair, the North Carolina 4-H Development Fund, the Pinetops Development Corporation and the South Edgecombe Booster Club.

The list goes on and on, for Sugg rarely stands still and he speaks as fast as he works.

He committed much his life to young people and he's proud of the work he has done with them.

In fact, he says, "You take a lot of the Boy Scout oath into business with you."

He's at his best when he's talking about peanuts — a commodity he dearly loves.

The NCPGA, Sugg notes, deals primarily with promoting the use and consumption of peanuts in the domestic and export market, so promotion and education are a vital part of its function.

The organization is also heavily involved in research and has been supporting nearly 20 research projects at NCSU to identify growers' production problems and marketing problems.

There is legislation at both the state and national levels and Sugg has been deeply involved in attempting to make certain peanut farmers get their fair share.

He has worked on three national farm bills, which, he says, is

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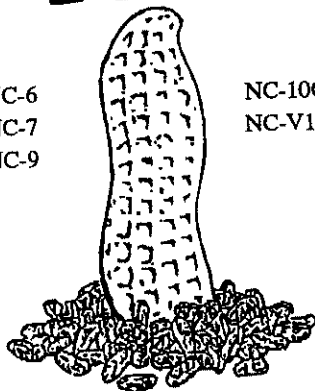
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enough for any man in one lifetime.

He describes it by saying, "I've prayed, I've cried and I've laughed.

"It's been enjoyable, but it really is not a fun thing.

"There is a lot of tension and whoever takes my place must know how to handle stress."

A major task, as Sugg sees it, is talking people into consuming more peanuts.

National consumption today, he says, is 10 pounds per capita.

He would like to see that increase to 12 or 15, but points out that in some parts of the world, consumption is five pounds per capita or less.

India is the world's largest producer of peanuts and they are used for oil.

China is the second largest supplier and the U.S. is third, producing approximately 10% of the world's supply.

For eatable peanuts alone, the U.S. provides 35% of the world supply, down from the 50% share it once held.

Canada had been buying vast quantities of American peanuts until shortages developed in the 1980s.

The short crop forced Canada to look to China and Argentina for its supply and American growers have never recovered that market.

In 1991, North Carolina was the nation's fourth largest producer of

peanuts, behind Georgia, Texas and Alabama.

Virginia, however, has the highest yield and North Carolina is second.

The peanut quota set by the Secretary of Agriculture is designed for the domestic market, Sugg points out, and peanuts raised by a grower above his quota are called additional peanuts and

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generally go into the export trade.

Sugg says his year as chairman of the national organization has been a good one for him.

Sugg describes his service as national chairman as "part of my swan song before I retire."

The U.S. is perceived throughout the world as producing the best quality peanuts, Sugg said, and must "keep fighting to make sure we stay number one."

Sugg also is strongly concerned about the outcome of the GATT talks because there is talk of cutting support prices in the U.S. by as much as 20%.

The danger, he says, is that supports could be cut below the cost of production and it could undermine the entire peanut program.

"The peanut industry is here to stay and some of the best peanut farmers are here in North Carolina," he says.

Growing peanuts, he points out, is not like growing corn or soybeans.

"It is a specialty crop and takes a lot of care and nurturing.

"It is bombarded by insects, disease and nematodes.

"You have to buy specialized equipment and it takes a sizable investment to get into peanut farming because of the need for special diggers, special combines and special wagons."

He and his wife, the former Eva Tolson of Edgecombe County, have three children and eight grandchildren.

Dennis is a banker in Wilson, Barry is in the roofing business in Greenville and Vicki is a teacher working with disabled children in Farmville.

Although the Suggs own a few farms, they do not actively farm. But don't expect Fleet Sugg to simply park himself in a rocking chair on the front porch when he retires.

In fact, he doesn't have a rocking chair in the house.

He simply wants to "change my gears and change my priorities and let my family be Number One.

"I expect I will be as busy as ever, but with my church, my family and my civic affairs."