



REMEMBERING GIL CLARK



1922-2016

Gilbert Burleson Clark, one of the original hurricane specialists of the National Hurricane Center, passed away peacefully on August 8, 2016 at the age of 93. Gil, as he was affectionately known, was a mentor to many at NHC and a friend to all of us.

Gil was born October 30, 1922 in Austin, Texas. He attended the University of Texas before serving in the Army in World War II, seeing action on Okinawa, Saipan, Tinian, Guam, the Philippines and other locations in the West Pacific. After the war, he completed his graduate studies in Meteorology at UCLA and married Nancy, his wife of 65 years. Growing up in Texas, Gil developed a fascination for severe weather – especially hurricanes. This passion led him to pursue a career in weather forecasting, where he landed his dream job as a hurricane forecaster at the National Hurricane Center in Miami in the mid-1950s. There, he was part of the team that forecasted every Atlantic hurricane from 1956-1990. When the practice of adding male names to hurricanes began in 1979, he was called upon to help choose new names for the upcoming storms. The name he chose for the 7th storm of 1988, Gilbert, ended up attached to one of strongest Atlantic storms on record.

Even after Gil retired from government service in 1990, he continued to visit the Hurricane Center, offering assistance to forecasters over the course of the next decade, especially during active hurricane periods. He also spent years researching and charting the storms that predated modern technology. Gil was a true “weather nut” and became known as the man who loved bad weather. He will be remembered not only for his masterful skills in forecasting hurricanes, but also for a career dedicated to the training and mentoring of young meteorologists whose own successful careers he helped launch through his knowledge, compassion, and kind spirit.

Gil received two Silver Medals from U. S. Department of Commerce. The first was awarded when he recognized a severe weather threat developing in the southeastern Gulf of Mexico. Using his authority as lead forecaster, Gil called the Cuban Government and requested the immediate closure of the Havana Harbor, thus preventing the departure of a flotilla of Cuban refugees. The overloaded vessels didn't leave port, likely preventing a catastrophic loss of life. The second was for exemplary service as part of the team forecasting Hurricane Gilbert. He also received honors as NOAA Forecaster of the Year, and was named a Fellow of the American Meteorological Society.

Fishing and football were Gil's other favorite pastimes. He spent many a weekend diligently documenting tide and winds, as well as the fish totals. If he wasn't fishing, he was likely watching football – but with two TVs on – one tuned to the game and one tuned to the Weather Channel.

Gil and his wife Nancy were active members of Coral Way Methodist Church in Miami for many years. He joined and attended the First United Methodist Church of Pearsall, Texas in his later years.

Gil Clark was an elite among elites in the field of meteorology, a legend for his years of public service. The only thing Gil was more accomplished at was being a wonderful human being, a sweet father, and a loving husband.



Gil Clark giving a map discussion at the National Hurricane Center, circa mid-1970s.

With hurricane specialist Lixion Avila, Gil Clark shows the report from the hurricane hunter plane of the record low air pressure measured in Hurricane Gilbert, 1988.

Hurricane specialists Miles Lawrence, Gil Clark, Lixion Avila, Max Mayfield and Ed Rappaport – December 2, 1995

Link to Gil Clark's retirement party from November, 1989:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xh_7VFdbVNw