



Donald W. VanArtsdalen

Born: October 21, 1919, in Doylestown, Pennsylvania

Died: May 21, 2019, in Doylestown, Pennsylvania

**Federal Judicial Service:**

Judge, U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania

Nominated by Richard M. Nixon on September 10, 1970, to a new seat authorized by 84 Stat. 294.

Confirmed by the Senate on October 8, 1970, and received commission on October 15, 1970.

Assumed senior status on October 21, 1985.

Service terminated on May 21, 2019, due to death.

**Education:**

Williams College, 1937-1940

University of Pennsylvania Law School (now Carey Law School), LL.B., 1948

**Professional Career:**

Canadian Army: 1940-1942

U.S. Army Sergeant: 1942-1945

Private Practice, Doylestown, Pennsylvania: 1948-1970

District Attorney, Bucks County, Pennsylvania: 1954-1958

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Judicial Biography

Judge VanArtsdalen was born and raised in Doylestown and remained a lifelong Bucks County resident. Following graduation from Doylestown High School, he enrolled in Williams

College in Williamstown, Massachusetts, but left in his junior year to join the Canadian Army to fight in World War II. As a Canadian soldier from 1940-1941, VanArtsdalen was stationed as an artillery anti-aircraft gunner at various sites in and around London during the Battle of Britain, including the intense bombing campaign known as the Blitz.

After the United States entered the war in 1941, VanArtsdalen transferred to the United States Army and volunteered to join the newly formed all-volunteer First Ranger Battalion (U.S. Army Rangers). These soldiers became famously known as “Darby’s Rangers.” During the North African and Italian campaigns, VanArtsdalen was part of four “first wave” beachhead landings, ahead of the main forces, at Arzew (Algeria) and Sicily, Amalfi-Salerno and Anzio (Italy). While a Ranger, he served at various times as a rifleman, company scout, bazooka operator and mortar crew sergeant.

VanArtsdalen was involved in the fierce fighting in Tunisia that led to the eventual defeat of Rommel’s German “Afrika Korps.” After the very costly fighting at Anzio, VanArtsdalen was given orders to return to the United States and completed his military service at Fort Meade, Maryland. For his five years of service, VanArtsdalen was awarded nine medals and citations, including a Bronze Star Medal for valor in action.

\*In 1970, President Richard M. Nixon named four judges, all Republicans, to fill newly authorized seats for the Eastern District. They were Edward R. Becker, Donald W. VanArtsdalen, Daniel H. Huyett 3rd, and J. William Ditter Jr., each of whom resided in a different county. They progressed through confirmation in lockstep.

Judge VanArtsdalen was self-employed as a practicing attorney from 1948 until 1954 when he was elected District Attorney of Bucks County, an office he held until 1958 when he returned to private practice. Donald W. VanArtsdalen was an experienced trial lawyer who resided and practiced in Bucks county.

Over four years after the tragic events of September 11, 2001, in the first part of 2006, a highly publicized trial arising out of the horror of that day was broadcast by closed circuit television into the courthouse in Philadelphia. Zacarias Moussaoui, one of the conspirators alleged to have been involved in the hijackings, was indicted in Alexandria in the Eastern District of Virginia. He ultimately pleaded guilty, and a lengthy jury trial was then held to determine whether the death penalty should be imposed.

Congress had enacted legislation requiring the trial to be broadcast to other courthouses for the convenience of family members of victims so that they, but not the public, could observe the proceedings nearer their homes. Judge Leonie Brinkema of the Eastern District of Virginia designated the United States Courthouse in Philadelphia as one of those venues. Special passes were provided to the distraught viewers, and enhanced security was put

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\* The following material is excerpted from JUDGE HARVEY BARTLE, III, MORTALS WITH TREMENDOUS RESPONSIBILITIES, A HISTORY OF THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF PENNSYLVANIA, 3-12 (Saint Joseph’s University Press, 2011). Reproduced with the permission of the author, Judge Harvey Bartle, III, and the publisher, Saint Joseph’s University Press.

in place. Many family members of those who died attended every day, and their emotions were palpable.

The rules for the trial directed that a judge preside in any courtroom into which the broadcast was to be transmitted. Here, Judges VanArtsdalen, Ditter, and Reed as well as Magistrate Judge Peter Scuderi took turns doing so for approximately seven weeks during the opening statements of counsel, the presentation of evidence and arguments, the taking of the verdict, and the imposition of sentence. The jury declined to inflict the death penalty, and Moussaoui was imprisoned for life without the possibility of release.

He died on May 21, 2019, a few months shy of his 100<sup>th</sup> birthday, in Doylestown, Pennsylvania.