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Tommy Thompson quarterbacked the winning '48 and '49 teams.

Tommy Thompson dies; led Eagles to two titles

By Robert Seltzer
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Former Philadelphia quarterback Tommy Thompson, 72, who led the Eagles to NFL championships in 1948 and 1949, died yesterday at his home in Calico Rock, Ark.

Mr. Thompson died at home about 12:50 p.m. after fighting brain cancer for almost a year, according to his wife, Dodge.

"He was looking great and had

been sleeping," she said. "I went to the drugstore to pick up some medication, and when I came back he was gone."

Mr. Thompson, who ranks third behind Ron Jaworski and Norm Snead in all-time Eagles passing, joined the Eagles in 1941 and left two years later to serve in the Army during World War II. He returned to the team in 1945 and played through

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THOMPSON, from 1-C

the 1950 season. Mr. Thompson led the league in completion percentage in 1946 (55.3 percent) and in touch-down passes in 1948 (25).

Although his passing was impressive enough, teammates marveled at him because he performed with a severe handicap. He was blinded in one eye by a childhood accident, and team members joked that he stood tough in the pocket because he could not be intimidated by onrushing linemen he could not see. But nobody joked about his toughness and leadership abilities.

"It was his left eye that was bad, and I'll tell you how I know," said Al Wistert, 68, a former tackle who now lives in Thousand Oaks, Calif. "He wouldn't throw very often to Jack Ferante, our left end. That made Jack very angry because he was throwing to Pete Pihos [the right end] all the time. I don't think Tommy could see out of that eye. I think he was legally blind, not completely blind.

"But, boy, he was a great athlete, and he certainly did a marvelous job as quarterback. Besides the fact that he could throw strikes so often, the thing you remember most about him was the fact that you couldn't intimidate him. He had so much bravery. He had so much heart. When someone knocked him down, he'd get right back up and throw a strike."

After leading the team to the 1947 championship game, which they lost, 28-21, to the Chicago Cardinals, he led the team to its first championship in 1948, avenging their loss the previous year by beating the Cardinals, 7-0.

"He was a good leader," said Hall of Fame running back Steven Van Buren, 68. "He didn't think anybody could beat us."

In 1949, Mr. Thompson led the team to a 12-1 season, beating the Los Angeles Rams, 14-0, in the championship game. After retiring from the Eagles after the 1950 season, he coached in the Canadian Football League, said Eagles spokesman Jim Gallagher. Mr. Thompson later coached with the Cardinals and at the University of Arkansas.

"I have great sadness at his passing," Wistert said. "But I got to say that maybe God was merciful because he was suffering so much at the end."

Mr. Thompson traveled to Philadelphia in November for a reunion of the Eagles championship teams, and he was in such good spirits that he almost seemed ready to take a snap from center.

"At the reunion, I told him, 'Tommy, I got all the credit for all those games we won, but you were the guy who did it for us,'" Van Buren recalled. "He loved that. Then I told him I didn't mean it. But I was just joking."

Born in Calico Rock, Mr. Thompson grew up in Fort Worth, Texas. He starred at the University of Tulsa.

The couple had no children. Funeral arrangements were incomplete last night. Dodie Thompson said her husband had requested only a graveside service.

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