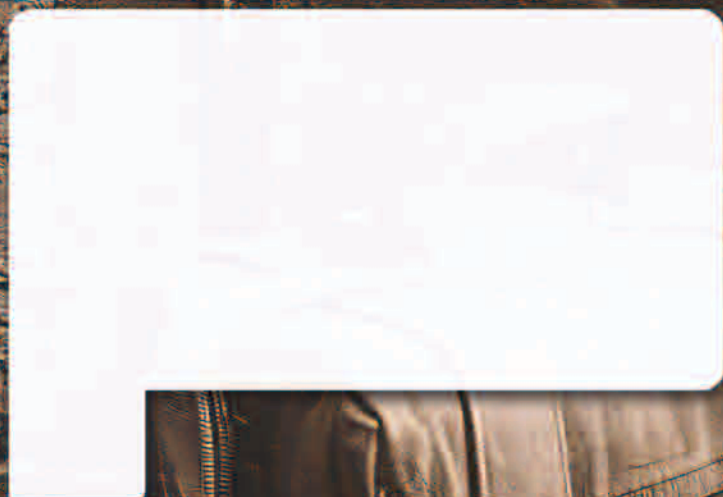


OKLAHOMA VETERAN NEWSMAGAZINE **FREE COPY**

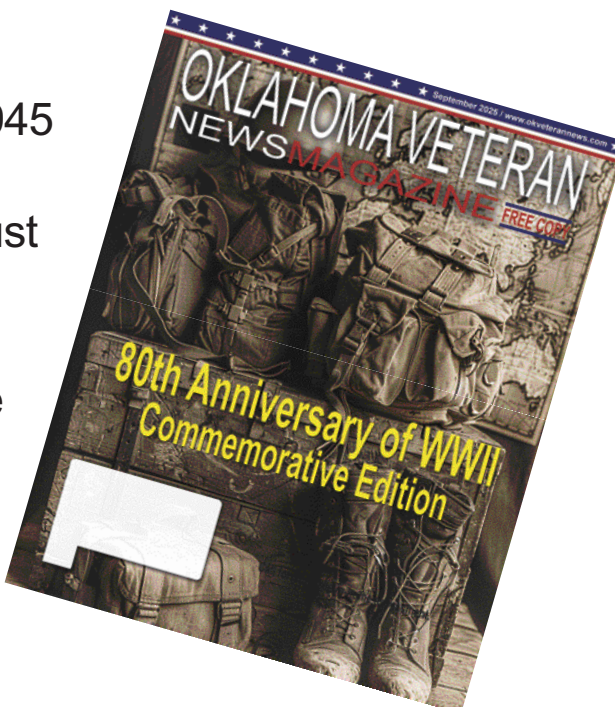
**80th Anniversary of WWII
Commemorative Edition**





MORE INSIDE

On The Cover: September 2, 1945
Having agreed in principle to unconditional surrender on August 14, 1945, Japan formally surrenders, ending World War II. This issue commemorates those dates.



OKLAHOMA VETERANS
NEWSMAGAZINE

Serving Active Duty Military, Veterans and Their Families

Serving the state, Oklahoma Veteran News is locally
Owned and Published Monthly by
Metro Publishing, LLC P.O. Box 239, Mustang, OK.
73064 Phone: (405) 631-5100/Fax: (405) 631-5103

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ADVERTISING/BUSINESS

Print, digital and sponsored posts are accepted at the review and approval of the publishers.

Advertising in Oklahoma Veteran News,
www.okveterannews.com as well as and

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Eighty-One Years Later, a Fallen Marine Is Laid to Rest

Memorial Service

Private Richard Gordon Wright, U.S. Marine Corps, born June 6, 1921, in Sparks, Oklahoma, was buried with military honors on July 18 at Dignity Memorial Park Cemetery in Oklahoma City. The ceremony began at 2 p.m., with cicadas loudly singing in the hot, still air.

Was that unusual?

Yes. Why?

Wright died on November 20, 1943, 81 years ago during WWII on Betio Island in the Gilbert Islands. His remains were not identified until February 8, 2024, by the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA) and returned to Oklahoma City on July 11, 2025 - more than eight decades after his death.

As the service drew near, at least 75 people gathered in quiet respect. Members from American Legions (Posts 19, Woodward; 111, Edmond; 88, Norman; 142, Hominy, and others) and Veterans of Foreign Wars (Posts 4938, Edmond; 7977, Skiatook; 3077, Collinsville; 7180, Owasso, and others) came, as did those with no affiliation.

Although no one knew Wright personally, they came to witness the homecoming of a Marine who served his country with honor and gave his life for future generations.

Charli Ford, one of two historians and archivists of military history at the Hamilton VFW Auxiliary 4938 in Edmond (President Amanda Duncan is the other) gave the eulogy and thanked those who made Wright's repatriation possible, including "the DPAA (Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency) for their efforts to recover, organize, analyze and identify the remains of the missing. And a special thank you to Mr. (Narsease) Tolen, Richard's first cousin, for the donation of the DNA while he was still alive. His DNA was used to positively identify Richard." Her voice carried pride and emotion while she recounted Wright's early life. Ford ended with, "After today," Ford said, "Richard's journey comes to a close... May we never forget Richard's sacrifice."

Chaplain Ed Beesley, a Vietnam War veteran and member of Post 4938, described how well Betio Island was fortified by the Japanese against a large-scale amphibious assault by Americans. Beesley continued, "I want you to understand the Marines did it in three days...it was a fierce battle...which would come to be known in the Marine Corps as 'Bloody Tarawa.' What struck me, is...our own Oklahoma Marine was a part of the first wave on that beach landing on the 20th November, 1943...My understanding was that Richard's landing craft was hit by mortar fire..." Wright's 2nd Marine Regiment, about 150 men, was almost annihilated that day.

The service concluded with a prayer, seven-gun salute provided by VFW District 5, the playing of taps, and a moving flag folding ceremony followed by presenting it to Ed Zink of Weaubleau, Missouri, who represented the family. Zink is a second cousin to Wright. The



crowd slowly, quietly slipped away.

Wright's family

Zink spoke of his family's connection to Wright. "My mother's mother (Zink's grandmother) was the sister to Richard's mother. They were sisters...George Ann and Sharon are Richard's nieces and they knew about him. Their brother was named after him. So, they knew he was missing, they just never expected him to come home."

"I'm honored to be able to represent the family and to acknowledge his military career, as short as it was." Zink, a Marine, understands sacrifice. He served two tours of duty in Vietnam and one in Thailand. He praised the research Charlie Ford and VFW Post 4938 performed. "They've done a wonderful job. Charlie...has been unbelievable. She's been on this case for several years. They went above and beyond."

Identifying veteran remains

Amanda Duncan said, "We do a lot of work with MIAs, POWs. It is something our post and our auxiliary is very passionate about."



Pvt Richard Wright, USMC, was killed in Battle of Tarawa on Nov 20, 1943. His remains were identified Feb 8, 2024 and he was buried on July 18, 2025.

She explained the meticulous process of identifying remains. "When something like this happens, first of all, they (DPAA) look at the service record and where they enlisted out of." Other clues: where family lives(d) and where the deceased's military unit was engaged in battle.

In Wright's case, a relative was located in just a few days, though the full process - DNA testing, approvals, and transport - can take months. Ford described how she reached out to a family member through the Ancestry website after a relative built Wright's family tree. "I noticed she had him on the tree... trying to see... what relation she was and if we could find somebody to give DNA."

Private Wright is buried in the same cemetery as his father, Henry Wright, a World War I veteran, and grandfather and grandmother, William and Eva Wright. There are 1,185 Oklahoma MIA/POW servicemen awaiting repatriation.
 ● story by Lt Col Richard Stephens, Jr., USAFR, Ret.



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105 Years of Devotion to Faith, Family and Nation

At the age of 89, Woodie Brod Sylvester of Weatherford, Oklahoma, was asked to write about his experiences during WWII. The result was a five-page military autobiography. It's too long to print verbatim, but a summary of locations and activities are listed with several copied passages. Since the events took place 60 years ago, he didn't remember all the details.

The big take away is that Woodie served in the US Army Signal Corps starting on April 10, 1942, for over three years - two-and-a-half of them in continuous combat conditions - without leaving the war front. During WWII, soldiers had to serve for the duration plus six months.

Woodie said, "I started out as a buck private (E-1) and I turned out to be the personnel Sergeant Major (E-6) of a battalion with 500 men," a testament to his ability to increase responsibility and lead men in war. His life story is one of dedication to God, family and nation. He was born on August 2, 1917, in Chilton, Texas, to Woodie Alvin and Ida Marie (Brod) Sylvester. On August 9, 1938, Woodie and Mattie Elizabeth Adams eloped and married. They birthed three children: son, Sam and two daughters, Jana and Sue after the war.

Below are short descriptions of his amazing duty.

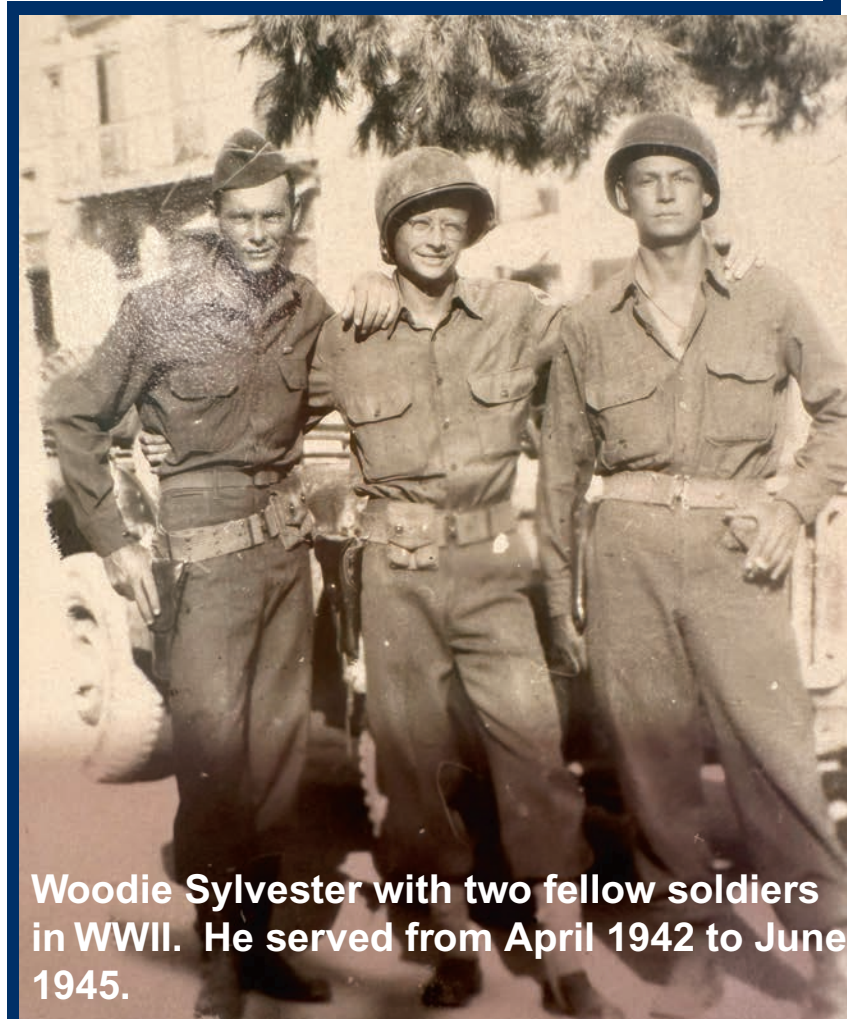
Location Dates and towns identified

North Africa - Landed in Casablanca, Morocco, on Christmas Eve 1942. On January 10, 1943, headed east towards Tunis, Tunisia. Woodie stated he was close to a soldier who stepped on a land mine and was killed; luckily, he was not hurt. In February 1943, his unit arrived at the Kasserine Mountains, where the Germans defeated the Americans and English in a major battle. Afterwards, General Patton arrived with the 3rd Army and they pushed the Germans out of North Africa.

Sicily - Sailed to Gela, Sicily. GIs gave food to hungry children. Marched to Palermo and made it there in about 31 days.

Italy - Landed on a beach north of Paestum, south of Pompeii, and fought in a battle. Afterwards, soldiers went up to tour volcano Vesuvius and made ash trays out of molten lava. Progressed north to Naples. Spent his second Christmas (1943) in Caserta. Marched to the monastery, Monte Cassino, in February 1944, and saw Allies bomb it. Proceeded north to Rome where Woodie and his company went to the Vatican and were given an audience with the Pope.

Corsica - Sailed to this island, preparing to invade France.



Woodie Sylvester with two fellow soldiers in WWII. He served from April 1942 to June 1945.

France - Sailed to St. Tropez, French Riviera. His unit joined other invasion forces, such as the 95th Infantry Division. Marched north, following the Rhone River, then moved between Lyon and Dijon. Reached Epinal. In late December 1944, his unit rested in Strasbourg, but retreated back to Epinal because of fears the Germans might win the Battle of the Bulge.

Germany - In 1945, crossed Rhine River and advanced to Heidelberg, then past Camp Dachau, infamous concentration camp. Woodie said they could smell Dachau for miles before they saw the camp but did not have any idea what the smell was. Arrived Darmstadt, and headquartered in the ruins of a university. Rotated back to Lubbock, Texas, in the summer and separated in October 1945. Several passages of Woodie's recollections are provided in this story.



Woodie Sylvester at 105 years old in July 2022. He served in North Africa, Italy, France and Germany during WWII.

North Africa - "The third echelon (of the signal battalion), which I was assigned to, sailed from Boston in early December, landing in Casablanca, Morocco, on Christmas Eve 1942...At Casablanca, we were housed in a warehouse and this would be the last inside housing for many, many months...We left Casablanca around January 10, 1943. Our company, "A," laid landlines for communications between frontline troops and HQ. It was very cold and we were sleeping in pup tents on sandy grounds. We would sleep at night and in the morning would wash our clothing in gasoline to kill the (sand) fleas. We started to suffer casualties from mines and other actions. Mine fields were everywhere. Many civilian children and adults suffered from these mines as well as our own troops.

We moved daily...toward Tunis, Tunisia, keeping as much pressure on the German army as possible. As we advanced through the desert, we arrived at the Kasserine Mountains. The German army under the direction of German General Rommell was waiting with the powerful Mark 4 tanks. The allies experienced great losses of men and equipment until the American tanks under the direction on General Patton arrived.

At times, the moves were so fast the line crews could not string wire fast enough to keep up with Patton's tanks. The wire being laid on the ground would break as fast as the line crews could put new wire in place due to tanks and half-tracks.

Italy - We finally entered Rome...So, some of us headed for the Vatican...We entered and were shown through the buildings and then told to be seated in a certain chapel. There were about 100 men in our group...and the Pope appeared and made a short statement. He spoke English quite well and also gave each man a cross to carry. This was a great honor...

France - The battalion...went into Strasbourg, France...We made our headquarters this time in a small hotel. Christmas of 1944 was only a few days away. We were supplied with all kinds of Christmas food, including fresh turkeys. About this time the Battle of the Bulge started and we were ordered to vacate and retreat at once back to Epinal. We destroyed all of our food supplies that we had received for Christmas.

Germany - On our way to Darmstadt, we passed the Camp Dachau where the Jewish people were confined...we could smell this camp but didn't know about what was happening on the inside. Other troops came in and liberated these people that were nothing but walking skeletons.

I must comment that the men I served with were the "best". Nothing could be said about them except "great-wonderful and they were like my brothers."
Woodie earned a Bronze Star on 19 May, 1945. Other medals received: WWII Victory Medal, Europe-Africa-Middle East Medal, American Campaign Medal.

Texas - I met my wife, Mattie, at Temple, Texas. This ended my 3 1/2 years in the military and I never had a leave to go home prior to this date.

Woodie told his life story to Stephens in July 2022, two months before he died. Woodie strongly believed in marriage. "When we got married, that was a lifetime thing. It's not anymore." Woodie and Mattie were married for 72 years.

In 1965, Woodie and Mattie purchased and operated a theater and a drive-in theatre they built in Weatherford. He served as a Weatherford City Commissioner for nine years, bringing the 3M Company to Weatherford and developing Rader Park. He was very active in the Weatherford Rotary Club (a Paul Harris Fellow), Weatherford Chamber of Commerce, First Baptist Church and the American Legion Post 091 (a member for 65 years).

In 1980, Woodie and Mattie retired to enjoy the fruits of their labor. At the age of 105-years, Woodie died on September 11, 2022.

Woodie is survived by his son, Sam Sylvester, and wife, Gwyn of Eufaula; two daughters, Jana Hale and husband, Doug and Sue Nabors and husband, Tommy, all of Weatherford. ●
story by Lt Col Richard Stephens, Jr., USAFR, Ret., and CAPT Douglas Hale, USNR, Ret.

A Marine Forever:

The WWII Service and Life of Harriet Frank

Harriet (Greenberg) Frank served in the USMC Woman's Reserve between April 29, 1945 (age 20) - July 17, 1946. Then, having women in the military was an experiment, but initiated so men could go overseas

Tim Stanley of the Tulsa World newspaper posted an article about Harriet Frank on Facebook in 2015 as part of a "WWII Legacy Keepers" series. The main portion of the article is his; the remainder is from Stephens who visited her in August.

With each one of the small black bags that crossed her desk, Harriet Frank never lost sight of what it represented: another young life cut short by war. "It was work you couldn't help but get emotionally involved in," she said of taking inventory of the personal effects of slain Marines, her first job at Marine Corps headquarters in 1945. Among the items collected in those black bags, Frank said, were photos, letters, Bibles and billfolds. One of the items that touched her most, she said, was a baby book...the mother had mailed the book to him. It contained a photo of the baby and a copy of the birth certificate. It was sad, she said, to see things like that and to consider the life that was lost.

At the time of the attack on Pearl Harbor, Dec. 7, 1941, Frank was 16 years old.

"I knew I was going to do something, I just didn't know what," she said. Being Jewish, and knowing what was going on in Europe, was additional motivation, she added. To join one of the recently established women's military branches, you had to be at least 20.

By the time her 20th birthday rolled around on April 29, 1945, Frank had already completed her paperwork to join the Marine Corps Women's Reserve, or "Lady Marines" as it was often called. "The Marines were the finest branch. They were the bravest, best-looking," Frank said, laughing. "I wanted to be one of them." After six weeks of basic training at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina.

Frank was assigned to work at Marine Corps headquarters in Arlington.

After (inventorying personal effects)...she was moved to the office that handled discharges.

Someone down the hall yelled, "The war is over!" And we literally ran from Henderson Hall (in Arlington) clear into D.C. There, on the streets of nation's capital, Frank joined with the throngs of celebrants. "Everybody was kissing everybody. I've never kissed so many strangers in my life," she laughed.

Frank enjoyed the Marines, she said, and might've made a career of military service. But at the time it wasn't an option; the women's branches had not yet been made permanent. So, taking her discharge in August 1946 as a corporal, Frank resumed her studies at Oklahoma A&M on the G.I. Bill and completed a degree in sociology. While a student, she met her future husband on a blind date. Ben Frank was a WWII veteran himself, an Army lieutenant who'd served in the China-Burma-India theater. "Two months later we were engaged, and after four months we were married,"



Harriet Frank, age 100, smiles while looking at the memory book her daughter made of her service during WWII. (top right) Harriet (Greenberg) Frank served in the USMC Women's Reserve from April 29, 1945 (age 20) to July 17, 1946 as a Records Clerk in Washington, DC.

Frank said.

The couple settled in Konawa and raised three children together. Frank worked for years in child welfare with the Department of Human Services. When her husband died in his early 50s, she took over the store he ran in Seminole County. Later she moved back to the Tulsa area.

Frank said her military service served her well. "It made me more independent. It gave me more confidence in myself." Among her fellow veterans, though, she's still partial to one branch. "The Marines are still the best," she said, laughing. "And don't you forget it!"

"I wanted the Marines" said Frank. "They were the best branch in my mind and we were treated very well." However, many male Marines didn't want women in uniform, so they rudely called women "BAMs," meaning, "Big-Ass Marines." "We weren't gonna put up with it," Frank said with a feisty tone. Smiling, she recalled she would reply they were "HAMS," for "Half-Ass Marines."

During basic training at Camp Lejeune, "We were put on guard duty at boot camp... we'd sometimes do it." But guard duty was not with a M1 rifle. "A wooden one, shaped like a gun. It was kind of embarrassing," she said, laughing. But that's what we did...we marched back and forth along the sidewalk with the wooden gun."

Harriet Frank joined the "centenarian club" in April. Her advice? "Take care of yourself. You're the only person that can really take care of yourself." ●
story by Tim Stanley and Lt Col Richard Stephens, Jr., USAFR, Ret.



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Not a Gentle Giant

The USS Alabama Battleship

There's a lot to like at the 155-acre Battleship Memorial Park in Mobile, Ala.: USS Alabama, a WWII South Dakota Class battleship; USS Drum, a WWII submarine; Medal of Honor Aircraft Pavilion; 29 aircraft from WWII to the Cold War Era on the grounds; and four memorials to veterans. Whew! You'll spend about four hours taking it all in.

USS Alabama

Since 1965, about 3.5 million people a year go on one to three self-guided tours (red, yellow, green) through four decks (floors, for landlubbers) of the ship from bow to stern (front to rear) to learn the story how her brave and dedicated crew helped win the war. Each tour takes about 45 minutes.

Peer into the rooms of bakeries, workshops, brig, intercom (communications), gunnery-aviation, and plotting (firing guns) and walk along seamen's bunks (or "racks") and the mess hall.

These areas have displays. There are original sailor uniforms in the quartermaster (supply) room; dishes, pots and pans in the galley (kitchen); and papers, family photos, uniforms and

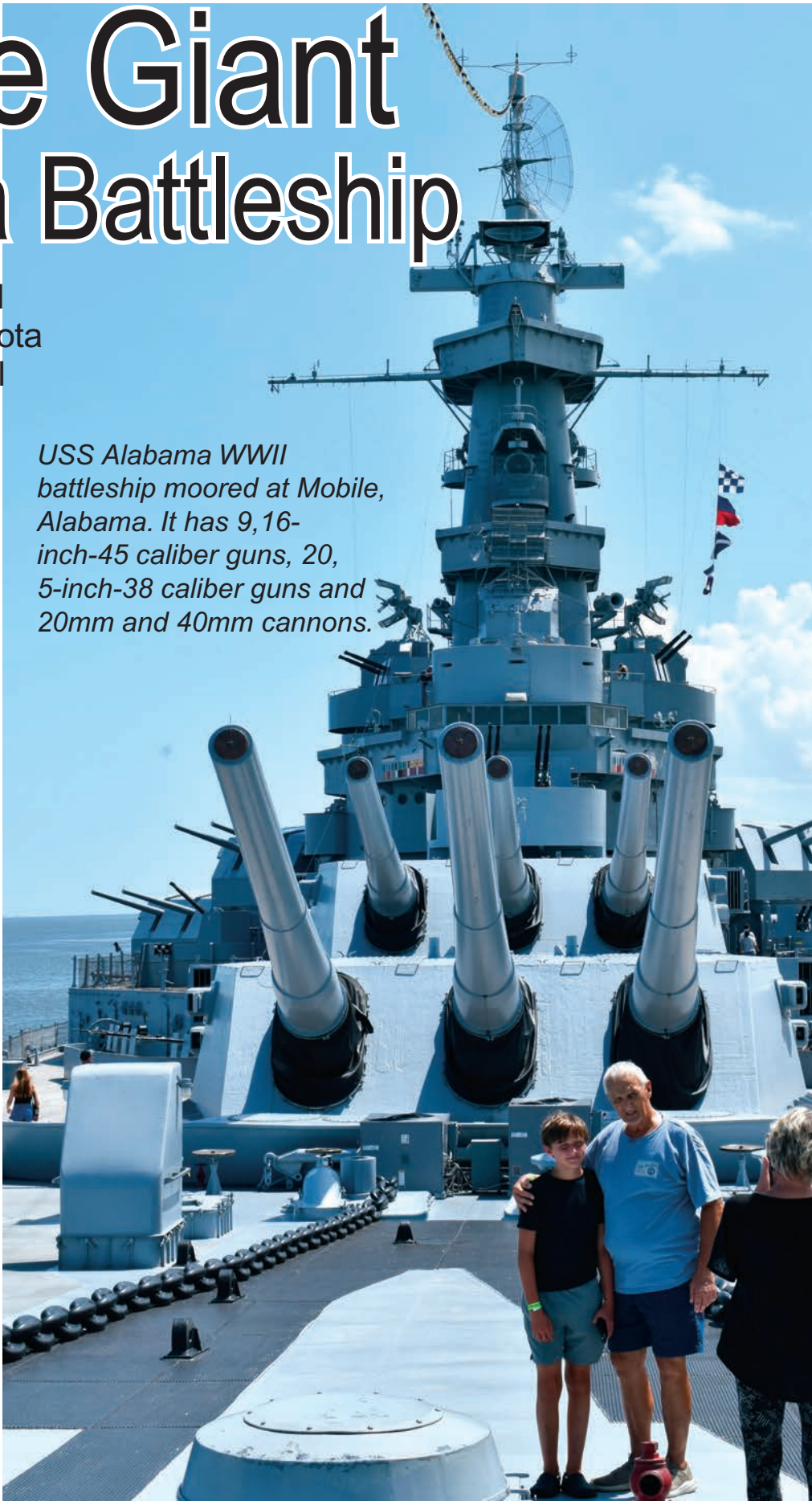
radios left behind in multiple offices; and medicine in the dispensary.

While touring the ship, Mike Thomas of Ft. Worth said he got a "better feel of what crewmen felt and how they existed. It's like a mini-city." True. The Alabama sailed with 2,500 sailors and Marines. For Larry Genson of Michigan and Dwanda Schwaz of Mobile, the informative displays and placards were useful. "I like to see how they lived; their food and quarters" Larry explained.

Range:	15,000 Nautical miles at 15 knots
Crew:	2,500 crew members at the height of WWII
Power Plants:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Horsepower: 130,000 hp• 4 engine rooms, each carrying 2 boilers and 2 turbines.• Four propellers, 2 five bladed and 2 four bladed, each weighing 18.2 tons.
Armament	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 9 – 16"/45 cal. Guns (3 turrets)• 20 – 5"/38 cal. Guns (10 mounts)• 48 – 40mm Guns (12 mounts)• 52- 20mm Guns

Special exhibits tell visitors about the USS Mobile, Iwo Jima 1945, the Imperial Japanese Navy, 20mm Oerlikons and 40mm Bofors (cannons), Navy divers and more. Jeff and Karen Banks visited from Johnson City, Tenn. They said, "I love the history (of the ship). Many exhibits opened up to see how the ship worked, taking us back into time." Alabama veterans recounted their sea tours on video in a couple of places.

Genevise Harris, Director of Marketing, said visitors visit about two-thirds of the ship, which is 680 feet long and 108 feet abeam (wide). Be sure to lift your legs and lower your head in doorways. The tour is not suitable for people using walkers and wheelchairs. Most of the ship is air conditioned.



USS Alabama WWII battleship moored at Mobile, Alabama. It has 9, 16-inch-45 caliber guns, 20, 5-inch-38 caliber guns and 20mm and 40mm cannons.

History and warfare

The keel of the USS ALABAMA (BB-60) was laid at the Norfolk Navy Yard, Portsmouth, Virginia, on February 1, 1940, became operational on March 20, 1943, was decommissioned on January 9, 1947 and became a tourist attraction in 1965.

The Alabama's advanced design enabled it to steam at 28 knots, almost 32 miles per hour.

The crew of the Alabama earned nine battle stars, engaged in 10 bombardments, and shot down 22 aircraft in her 51-month sailing history in the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. Placards stated while the original role of battleships was to "engage surface ships, their role shifted to include playing shepherd to the carriers, protecting them

from both aircraft and enemy ships” and “gunfire support for allied troops on the ground.”

Asked why preserving and displaying warships like the USS Alabama is important, Harris said, “It’s a part of our history. It’s good for the younger generation to see what was done in the past.” For more information, go to the USS Alabama Memorial Park website or watch a 29:30-minute video titled, “Legacy of a Titan,” on YouTube.

USS Drum

See how the 72-member “Silent Service” crew worked and lived before you leave. According to park’s website, “Of the DRUM’s 13 war patrols, all save the second, ninth, and last two, were designated “successful.” She received a total of 12 battle stars for World War II service. She is credited with sinking 15 ships, a total of 80,580 tons of enemy shipping, the eighth highest of all U.S. submarines in total Japanese tonnage sunk.”

Medal of Honor Aircraft Pavilion

The hangar holds aircraft from WWII to the Cold War. The collection includes a Red Ball Express display, honoring those men who ran supplies during WWII; a Red-Tail P-51 airplane; and a VH1-N/ Bell 212 helicopter used by several presidents. A highlight is walking around a once super-secret A-12 Black Bird spy plane.

Memorials

The Korean War, Vietnam War, Fallen Guardian and Fallen Hero 9/11 Memorials pay tribute to the men and woman who served during those periods.

Park information

The park is open 8-5 daily. Prices range from free (children up to 5, active duty military), \$6 (ages 6-11), \$18.00 (ages 12-55), and \$15 (veterans, ages 55+). Stevie’s Kitchen grills burgers and hotdogs and serves salads, pizza and drinks. ● story by Lt Col Richard Stephens, Jr., USAFR, Ret.

Visitors can go in the USS Drum, a WWII submarine. It earned 12 battlestars and sank 15 Japanese ships. Mobile, Alabama is in the distance.



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Real “Top Gun” Action Comes to TV

Veterans and patriots will soon be treated to a rare insight into the current training provided at Top Gun elite fighter pilot training in a six-part National Geographic docuseries, “Top Guns: The Next Generation.”

Beginning September 16 at 8 p.m., the six-part series follows a group of Navy and Marine Corps pilots as they navigate the rigorous Advanced Flight Training Program. The series captures the high-stakes aerial training, including dogfights, bombing drills, and challenging carrier approaches, highlighting the intense pressure and mental fortitude required to succeed. Their courage and determination will inspire and command respect from viewers.

“As in any docuseries or documentary about the United States Navy and Marine Corps, it will always be the intent to show the American people the professionalism and discipline of the United States Navy/Marine Corps Team,” Del City retired Navy Captain John Keilty said this week. “and in the case of Top Gun to highlight the mission to win in combat by training the best strike fighter aviators who then elevate combat readiness in the Fleet!”

This documentary series provides an inside look at the demanding and highly competitive world of elite fighter pilot training in the U.S. Navy and Marine Corps. Only the very best will make it through the program. The series is not just entertaining, but also educational, offering a unique insight into the training process.

The series goes beyond the aircraft and follows the fighter pilots through a six-month training regimen. Their experiences both in the air and during their off-base lives with family and friends are on display, providing a unique and engaging perspective on the lives of these future “patch-wearing” pilots. (patch refers to completion of Top Gun)

Some of the creative team behind “Top Gun: Maverick” were involved in filming the series. In-cockpit cameras deliver a front-row view of the action, adding to the immersive experience as they offer unprecedented access to one of the Navy’s most elite fighter pilot programs.

While the series shares a similar spirit with the “Top Gun” movies, it’s a documentary series following real pilots in training, not a fictional story.

Two of the most dramatic episodes will be “HEAD-TO-HEAD,” which focuses on pilots under training facing their final dogfighting test against an instructor before graduation and the finale, “LAST CHANCE,” leads up to graduation and the students’ last chance to earn their patch.

Episodes are available to stream the next day on Disney+ and Hulu.

Oklahoma boasts a Veteran Naval Aviator who was a Navy Test Pilot and flew with



Del City retired Navy Captain John Keilty retired again recently from his role with the NJROTC program at Del City High School.



many Top Gun graduates. Retired Captain John Keilty had a long and distinguished flying career in the U.S. Navy spanning 26 years. Last month, he retired after 24 years teaching high school and college math and Science, coaching HS football and baseball and being a senior NJROTC Instructor.

He graduated from the U.S. Naval Test Pilot School (USNTPS) in 1984 and was selected to command USNTPS from 1993 to 1995. It was during his CO tour where he participated in the first U.S. Navy/Russian Test Pilot Technical Exchange Program. He was one of seven American test pilots sent to Zhukovsky Air Base (north of Moscow) and the Gromov Flight Research Institute shortly after the

Cold War, meeting with Russian pilots and discussing flight test policy, processes, and procedures.

The program was a multifaceted initiative designed to foster cooperation and understanding between the two superpowers in the post-Cold War era. He flew a MiG-29 Russian fighter trainer, and others in his delegation flew the Sukhoi Su-34 Variant. He noted the Russian test pilots seemed to spend less time preparing for our training exercises, and the pre-flight briefings were less structured and significantly shorter in time than their American counterparts (granted, there was a language barrier, but there was a translator present for all briefings).

It seemed to Keilty that they lagged behind the greater autonomy and situational awareness afforded to US pilots operating within more networked systems and advanced avionics. American jets benefited from integrated systems like AWACS and data networks that enhanced overall situational awareness.

The exchange also involved Russian cosmonauts, such as Igor Volk, Chief of Russian Flight Test, who was on the Shuttle Buran Program. He was also the first test pilot to develop the aerobatic "cobra maneuver". Igor and six other Russian Test Pilots visited Patuxent River Naval Air Station in Maryland to test-fly American planes. Keilty described the opportunity to be in Russia and observe its "new state of freedom" as a thrill, and particularly enjoyed getting to know the Russian people and pilots involved in the program.

Keilty said he found it a privilege and an awesome opportunity to fly the MiG-29. Still, the experience highlighted the differing design philosophies and technological advancements that separated the two nations' fighter aircraft during that period. He acknowledged the MiG-29 was a capable aircraft for its time, but less advanced systems limited its overall effectiveness compared to its American counterparts.

While a Flight Deck and War Plans Officer, Keilty served on the aircraft carrier USS Theodore Roosevelt and the USS Coronado, home of the 3rd Fleet Commander.

Keilty retired in 2001 as Commander of Strategic Communications Wing ONE at Tinker Air Force Base.

He became a high school teacher to continue his community Involvement and patriotism. Keilty recently displayed continued service to America as the head of the Junior NROTC program at Del City High School. There, he was active in honoring veterans in his work memorializing Vietnam Veterans Bob Kalsu and seven men who attended Del City High School and went on to serve and die in combat in Vietnam.

Now known for his boisterous patriotic demeanor, Keilty demonstrates how modeling patriotism in Del City affects his motivation to be a thoughtful and inspiring leader.

As a former Navy pilot, Keilty says his attitude comes with the territory. "Every time I climbed into that jet and buckled in, it was like the feeling I had some 50 years ago in my first flight training, and the feeling that I represented the greatest country in the world was always very humbling and overwhelming to me," Keilty said in a recent interview. "In the seven years that I was in the NJROTC program at Del City High School, I saw many young kids voluntarily raise their right hand, take an oath to support and defend, and then go out and make significant contributions to America's defense and readiness - just one of the greatest feelings in my life!" ●

Story and photos by Darl DeVault, contributing editor



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Step Into WWII:

Planes Overhead, Gunfire in the Jungle, and Real Soldier Stories

How do you tell the story of World War II - through airplanes, tanks, uniforms, and the voices of those who lived it? At the National WWII Museum in New Orleans, the answer is yes. Exhibitions with 300,000 artifacts and over 12,000 personal narratives fill three floors of six buildings across seven acres.

Told from the American perspective, the museum tells the tragic story of the deadliest war in human history. Give yourself four to six hours to experience it fully.

Don't Miss These Galleries: D-Day, Europe, and the Pacific

You'll walk through a timeline of battles, such as North Africa, Sicily, Italy and Normandy, surrounded by maps, videos, audio broadcasts, photographs, written and oral histories, weapons, and personal items. Both Allied and Axis artifacts are on display.

The galleries use simulated environments to make visitors feel like they are there. For example, in the Rising Sun exhibit, first, you're on a ship with lifeboats and sleeping hammocks and later, you're walking in a dark island jungle amid sand, palm trees and a simulated pill box. Add shouted commands, gunfire, sounds of airplanes - even a P-51 fighter hanging overhead - and you feel you're in the fight.

One visitor, John Powell of Rochester, Illinois, said he liked "the level of immersion and audio-visual to support the artifacts and personal stories. It's better than what I expected."

Real People. Real Stories

The museum tells stories of the 16 million Americans who served. One heartbreaking moment is reading the telegram notifying the family of Private First Class James W. Oglesby that he was killed in action at Bougainville on March 25, 1944. Alongside it is a letter from his chaplain and a photo of Oglesby and his girlfriend - whom he secretly married just before departing.

Corporal Kenneth Kassels, who landed on D-Day, survived a gunshot wound to the head. His helmet, still bearing a bullet hole, is on display.

I met three members of the 150th Engineering Battalion, a Mississippi-based Army Guard unit visiting in uniform after field training and asked for their thoughts.

"You get the experience of what the soldiers went through at the time..." said Sergeant Major Micquel Miller. Captain Joel Baldwin said the WWII generation was "born into a time when the common man was needed to do extraordinary things." And Lieutenant Colonel Seth Davidson said "leadership hadn't changed much in 80 years, it (the museum) is helping us understand what past veterans went through and helps us as leaders today."

Beyond the Battlefield

The Arsenal of Democracy exhibit explores America's internal debate - isolationism vs. interventionism - from 1939 to 1941 before Pearl Harbor and how the nation mobilized its economy for war.

The Liberation Pavilion focuses on the aftermath: the Holocaust, the Monuments Men who searched for stolen art, war crime trials, and civil rights and other changes to inequality. The role of non-white men and women were also explored - 1.2 million African-Americans served; 350,000 women joined the military and 19 million worked; and Japanese-Americans were incarcerated.

In the Freedom Pavilion, enormous aircraft hang above you, including a B-17E Flying Fortress and a B-25J bomber, and vehicles of war are displayed.

I spoke with Chesley Hines, an 85-year-old Vietnam veteran and museum volunteer. "I grew up knowing about the war. I relate to these guys and girls (that served). It's so important to the city (New Orleans)...I enjoy meeting people.

Other exhibits

The museum includes more than 15 smaller exhibits and interactive features: Higgins Landing Boat, Voices From the Front (interactive conversations with members of the WWII generation), U.S. Merchant Marines: We Deliver the Goods, U.S.S. Tang Submarine Experience - an interactive mission, Freedom Theater on the war's global stakes and the 4D film "Beyond All Boundaries", narrated by Tom Hanks (temporarily unavailable). Whew!

A take-away is learning that WWII killed about 76,598 million people and reshaped many nations and formed new ones. Through it all, one truth resonates: freedom is



Private First Class James W. Oglesby was killed in action at Bougainville on March 25, 1944. He secretly married his girlfriend. Photo from National WWII Museum

never free.

Plan Your Visit

The museum is wheelchair accessible, fully air-conditioned, and offers three types of guided tours for \$20 each. Hours: 9:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. Tickets: \$26 for children (K-12), \$33 for seniors, \$26 for military (active, retired, or veteran). There are no audio phones.

There are two cafés inside and two more restaurants at the adjacent Higgins Hotel. Four gift shops offer everything from books and apparel to WWII-themed games.

In 2024, the museum estimated that 658 WWII veterans in Oklahoma were still alive. Their stories live on through this remarkable museum.

● story by Lt Col Richard Stephens, Jr., USAFR, Ret.

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Presidential Message on the 80th Anniversary of Winning World War II

On August 14, 1945, the Allied Powers accepted Imperial Japan's unconditional surrender in World War II, delivering a hard-fought American victory in the Pacific and bringing the deadliest war in human history to a decisive close. Eighty years later, our Nation remembers freedom's triumph over tyranny—and we proudly honor the truth that victory was made possible only by the unmatched courage, grit, and sacrifice of the fearless patriots of the United States Armed Forces.

After Imperial Japan's unprovoked attack on Pearl Harbor, America responded with overwhelming force, launching a two-front fight against totalitarianism. In the Pacific—across vast oceans and unforgiving terrain—American servicemen undertook one of the most grueling campaigns in military history. From the turning point at Midway to the fierce battles on Biak Island and the sands of Iwo Jima, our troops pushed forward against a ruthless enemy, island by island, driven by duty, honor, and an unrelenting devotion to the cause of freedom.

The path to peace came at a staggering cost. More than 100,000 Americans perished in the Pacific Theater alone. It was only through the commitment and patriotism of the Greatest Generation that the Japanese Empire was defeated, ensuring that the world would be spared from the oppressive clutches of destruction and tyranny—and that America would remain a beacon of liberty and hope for the entire world for future generations. Today, Japan has become our strongest ally in the Pacific, hosting more than 50,000 American troops who stand guard against new totalitarian regimes and their expansive ambitions.

As we celebrate the 80th anniversary of winning World War II, we reflect on the sacrifices and bravery of our Nation's



troops who secured our freedom and victory. We remember with deep reverence the fearless warriors who raised our beautiful Stars and Stripes atop distant islands. Above all, we pay tribute to all those who stormed foreign shores under enemy fire to inflict the full fury of American might to defend our interests, our people, and our beloved homeland against forces of evil.

Their enduring triumph reminds us that peace is never promised, but is earned through sacrifice, defended with strength, and kept alive by those willing to risk their lives for the survival of our freedom and our beloved way of life. Guided by this vision, my Administration remains steadfastly committed to upholding a foreign policy of peace through strength to ensure that our citizens are always put first, our sovereignty is always defended, and our Nation remains the greatest country on earth.

May God bless the memory of those who fell, and may we always remain worthy of the freedom they valiantly secured.

Donald J. Trump, 45th & 47th President of the United States.

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OK Veteran Commission Turning Progress into Action

The Oklahoma Veterans Commission brought its, August 8, 2025, meeting to the Oklahoma Department of Veterans Affairs Claremore Veterans Home, where commissioners, agency leaders, and guests gathered to discuss the future of veteran care and services across the state. The meeting began with the formal approval of the previous minutes—a quick procedural step—but the mood in the room carried a sense of purpose. This was not simply about routine governance. It was about action, change, and making visible progress for the more than 260,000 veterans who call Oklahoma home.

A major highlight of the meeting was the update on the newly formed Oklahoma Veterans Foundation. Already recognized as a charitable corporation in the state, the foundation is awaiting federal 501(c)(3) status, which will open the door to donations from individuals, corporations, and community organizations. These funds will be directed toward programs and services that directly benefit veterans, filling gaps where state and federal resources may fall short. Commissioners spoke about the importance of getting the legal and financial framework right from the start to ensure transparency and trust. “I’ve already had people tell me, ‘As soon as you can take a check, I’m writing one,’” Commissioner Martin said. “This is more than paperwork—it’s building the future of veteran support in Oklahoma.”

From there, attention turned to a challenge that touches the lives of veterans and their families every day: admissions to Oklahoma Veterans Homes. In the past, applications could take weeks to process, causing stress for families and delays in care. By replacing the outdated paper-based review process with a streamlined digital system, approval times have been cut to about 24 hours in most cases. This change allows medical staff, administrators, and other decision-makers to review applications simultaneously instead of sequentially. “We went from two or three weeks to about a day. That means a veteran who needs care now isn’t sitting in limbo,” explained Candice McIntire, Homes Outreach Coordinator. Each home now has a weekly admissions goal, and several are already approaching the Commission’s target of 90 percent occupancy. For many in the room, this represented not just operational efficiency, but a moral victory.

Another topic that received considerable discussion was the role of Veteran Service Officers (VSOs). Currently, veterans can receive different guidance depending on where they go for help—a situation ODVA wants to fix. The plan is to align training across all veteran service organizations so that every veteran receives the same high-quality, accurate information. “Whether a veteran walks into a state office or a local service organization, they should hear the same answers,” said Executive Director James “Jay” Bynum. In 2025, ODVA plans to roll out expanded hands-on training, including specialized instruction in disability claims, pensions, and military sexual trauma cases. Veterans in attendance expressed strong support for the move, with one noting, “It’s frustrating when two people give you two different answers. Consistency matters.”

Financial stability was another central theme. Following the pandemic, the cost of contract nursing staff increased dramatically, putting pressure on ODVA’s budget. By raising wages for full-time employees, ODVA has been able to recruit and retain more permanent staff, cutting the number of contract workers and saving millions of dollars annually. “We’ve been able to hire good people, keep them, and still save money,” said Executive Director Bynum. Centralizing purchasing across facilities is another cost-saving measure, bringing consistency to supply orders and reducing waste.

Infrastructure needs were also on the agenda. Many Oklahoma Veterans Homes are decades old, and some have rooms offline due to needed repairs. In Ardmore, for example, more than 20 beds are currently unusable because of water damage. Plans are in place to repair and modernize those spaces, with the goal of restoring them to service. “Every bed we can restore is another veteran we can serve,” Bynum emphasized.

Community outreach remains a major priority. ODVA is building a statewide veteran database to help connect veterans with benefits and services they may not know about. The agency plans to use this database as the backbone of a targeted outreach campaign, meeting veterans where they are—whether that’s at hospitals, community centers, or even sporting events. “It’s not enough to wait for veterans to come to us,” Bynum said. “We have to go to them.”

Training events are also evolving. The agency’s annual service officer training conference has been rebranded and moved to January to allow for more comprehensive, interactive learning. This year’s event will bring together ODVA staff and representatives from other veteran service organizations, reinforcing the idea that serving veterans



James “Jay” Bynum, Executive Director
Oklahoma Department of Veteran
Affairs.

is a shared mission. “It’s going to be hands-on, not just lectures,” Veterans Services Director, Lisa Acevedo promised.

Throughout the meeting, the human side of this work was never far from the surface. Candice described the joy of calling a family to say their loved one could be admitted the next day. “The relief in their voice—there’s nothing like it,” she said. Candice also told of a veteran who moved in after years of struggling alone. “He told us, ‘I wish I’d done this sooner. I feel like I’m part of a family again.’ That’s why we do this.”

As the meeting concluded, commissioners reflected on the progress made and the work ahead. Challenges remain: filling every available bed, modernizing aging facilities, and securing sustainable funding. But the momentum is real. “We’re on the right track,” Commissioner Martin. “Every improvement means a better life for the people who served our country.”

The next Oklahoma Veterans Commission meeting is scheduled for November 7, 2025, in Lawton. Between now and then, ODVA will continue its push for faster admissions, consistent services, stronger outreach, and more efficient operations—all in the name of honoring veterans through action, not just words. ●

By Daron Hoggatt, Oklahoma Department of Veterans Affairs, Public Information Officer

48th Annual Senior Day

Wednesday, September 17, 2025

Free admission for Seniors 55+ (ID required)

10 a.m - 6 p.m.



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Schedule of Activities

Exhibitors, Photo Booth & Free Health Screenings.....	10 a.m. - 6 p.m.
Registration & DOOR PRIZES	
Session 1.....	10 a.m. - 12 p.m.
Session 2.....	12 - 2 p.m.
Session 3.....	2 - 4 p.m.
Session 4.....	4 - 6 p.m.
Out & About: World Tour.....	10 a.m. - 2 p.m.
Rhythms: Seniors Unite Viewing & Voting.....	10 a.m. - 5 p.m.
Ms. Oklahoma Senior America.....	10:05 a.m.
Jim Garling	10:25 a.m.
Global Grooves.....	10:55 a.m.
Okie Stompers.....	11:20 a.m.
World of Colors.....	11:50 a.m.
CommUNITY TEAM.....	12:15 p.m.
King & Queen of the World Couples Challenge.....	1:05 p.m.
Vocal Sounds of Oklahoma.....	1:45 p.m.
Karaoke Contest.....	2:15 p.m.
Minute to Win It Game Show.....	3:15 p.m.
Irving Senior Center	4:25 p.m.
Global Hoopla.....	5:05 p.m.
Elvis.....	5:35 p.m.
Shawn Klush - Tribute to Elvis with Horns.....	7:30 p.m.

(Chickasaw Country Entertainment Stage)

For more information, visit the Senior Day page on the Oklahoma State Fair website.



Dr. Olivia J. Hooker

Survivor of Tulsa Race Massacre, Blazes Trail as First Black Woman on Active Duty in US Coast Guard

Early Life & Tulsa Race Massacre

Olivia Hooker was born in Muskogee, Oklahoma in 1915. When she was a child, she and her family moved fifty miles away to Tulsa...Hooker's father owned a clothing store in the affluent Greenwood District, sometimes known as America's "Black Wall Street."

In 1921, when Hooker was six years old, white supremacist rhetoric boiled over into vicious violence. Enraged by false rumors that a local Black man had assaulted a white woman, white mobs invaded the Greenwood neighborhood. Arsonists torched homes, businesses, churches, and schools...At least dozens - likely hundreds - of Black Tulsans died. Nearly 10,000 were left homeless.

Hooker and her family were at home when intruders carrying torches entered their backyard. In an interview with NPR, she remembered her mother hiding her and her siblings under the dining room table... "It was a horrifying thing for a little girl who's only six years old," she said, "trying to remember to keep quiet, so they wouldn't know we were there." The men destroyed the family record player and butchered the piano with an ax. The mob also burned her father's store to the ground.

The Hooker family left the city soon after the massacre. They moved to Topeka, Kansas and then to Ohio. Hooker earned a BA at Ohio State University and began working as a teacher. She told NPR that her parents urged her and her siblings to avoid "agonizing over the past" and instead "look forward and think how we could make things better."

SPARS Service

During World War II, the US military began opening its ranks to women for the first time...When the Navy's WAVES (Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service) program finally opened to Black enlistees in 1944, Hooker applied several times. But the WAVES turned her down... Instead, Hooker decided to try the Coast Guard Women's Reserve, better known as the SPARS. In a 2013 interview, she recalled that the SPARS recruiter was "just so welcoming, she wanted to be the first one to enroll an African American."

On March 9, 1945, Hooker became the first Black SPAR on active duty. Along with four other Black women, she completed boot camp at the Coast Guard's training center in Manhattan Beach, Brooklyn. She went on to further training as a yeoman, or administrative specialist...The head of the school wrote to every Coast Guard station commander-there were 11-to find an assignment for her. Only one, in Boston, agreed to take a Black yeoman.

At her post in Boston, Hooker worked in the separation center, processing paperwork for those who were discharging from the service. While she was there, the war ended...She left the SPARS having been promoted to yeoman 2nd class.

Asked about her SPARS service in 2013, Hooker reflected:

"I would like to see more of us realize that our country needs us, and I'd like to see more girls consider spending some time in the military, if they don't have a job at all and they have ambition,



Dr. Olivia Hoover, the first black woman in US Coast Guard. She joined in 1945. Her family's store was burned down during the Tulsa race riot in 1920

and they don't know what heights they might reach. It's really nice to have people with different points of view and different kinds of upbringing. The world would really prosper from more of that."

Psychologist

After leaving the SPARS, Hooker used her GI Bill benefits to go back to school. She earned an MA from Teachers College at Columbia University and a PhD in psychology from the University of Rochester.

Hooker taught at Fordham University in New York City from 1963 until 1985. She then worked at the Fred S. Keller School...She retired in 2002, at the age of 87. Hooker co-founded a division of the American Psychological Association (APA) dedicated to intellectual and developmental disabilities. The APA honored her with a Presidential Citation in 2011.

Later Life & Honors

Throughout her life, Hooker shared her memories of the Tulsa race massacre and advocated for justice for its victims. No one was charged, and most victims received no compensation from their insurance companies. Hooker co-founded the Tulsa Race Massacre Commission in 1997 to unearth the buried evidence of the massacre. She also pressed for reparations for Black Tulsans. She joined a lawsuit against the state and testified before Congress in 2005 and 2007. In the 2020s, victims and their descendants continue to seek acknowledgement and financial compensation for the massacre.

In 2015, the Coast Guard recognized Hooker by renaming a training facility and a dining hall in her honor. Hooker died in 2018 at the age of 103. ● By Ella Wagner, PhD, Cultural Resources Office of Interpretation and Education, National Park Service. Article used with the permission of the National Park Service, August 6, 2025.

Oklahoma City VA Medical Center to Receive Infrastructure Improvements



The Department of Veterans Affairs will realign an additional \$800 million this fiscal year as part of the Veterans Health Administration's Non-Recurring Maintenance program, which makes infrastructure improvements to health care facilities to ensure safe and effective patient care.

The extra funding means more resources to repair and update aging VA facilities and technology.

The money will be spent on a variety of planned and supplemental improvement projects at various VA health care facilities across the nation, including the Oklahoma City VA Medical Center, where the following improvements will occur:

- Abate Asbestos Phase 1
- Convert Surgery Air Handler to 80% return
- Repair/Replace Condensate Return System (and pump)

"This is another step forward in our efforts to make VA work better for the Veterans, families, caregivers and survivors we are charged with serving," said VA Secretary Doug Collins. "Improved facilities, equipment and infrastructure help improve care for Veterans, and these additional funds will enable VA to achieve that goal."

The additional funds will come from savings gleaned from various VHA reform efforts. The additions will bring total NRM program spending for fiscal year 2025 to \$2.8 billion - a nearly \$500 million increase from fiscal year 2024.

The improvements announced today are the latest in a growing list of VA accomplishments during the second Trump Administration, including:

- The backlog of Veterans waiting for VA benefits is down more than 37% since Jan. 20, 2025.
- Since Jan. 20, VA has offered Veterans nearly 1 million appointments outside of normal operating hours. These early-morning, evening, and weekend appointments are giving Veterans more timely and convenient options for care.
- VA has opened 16 new health care clinics across the nation since Jan. 20, 2025.
- The President's Fiscal Year 2026 budget request would add billions to VA's budget.
- VA has made it easier and faster for VA-enrolled Veterans to access care from non-VA providers at the department's expense.
- VA has implemented major reforms to make it easier for survivors to get benefits.
- VA is processing record numbers of disability claims, reaching 1 million claims processed for FY25 on Feb. 20 and reaching 2 million claims by June - both achievements were done in record time.



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Sep 2, 2025 - Sep 5, 2025 - Comanche County Free Fair LOCATION: Comanche County Fairgrounds
Lawton, OK 73501 **Note:**The Comanche County Free Fair in Lawton, held at the Comanche County Fairgrounds in southwest Oklahoma, invites visitors to an array of family-friendly activities and entertainment in September.

Sep 4, 2025 - Sep 13, 2025 - American Miniature Horse Registry National Show
LOCATION: Tulsa Expo Square Tulsa, OK 74114 **Note:** The American Miniature Horse Registry and American Shetland Pony Club are bringing their National Show to Tulsa's Expo Square during a ten day display of equestrian skills in different classes and categories.

Sep 4, 2025 - Sep 6, 2025 - Pittsburg County Free Fair LOCATION: Southeast Expo Center McAlester, OK 74501 **Note:** The Pittsburg County Free Fair is an annual fair showcasing 4-H and FFA exhibits, livestock, art and more. Peruse the fair's exhibit hall for art, photography, fabric and food exhibits.

Sep 5, 2025 - Sep 6, 2025 - Bluegrass & Chili Festival LOCATION: Downtown Tahlequah, OK 74464 **Note:** Wander through the festival grounds at the 45th annual Bluegrass & Chili Festival and enjoy an open car show, a children's area and a festival marketplace filled to the brim with arts, crafts and handmade goods for sale.

Sep 5, 2025 - Sep 7, 2025 - OK Air Fest LOCATION: 3001 Jensen Rd E El Reno, OK 73036 **Note:** Get ready for three unforgettable days of high-flying thrills and family fun at OK Air Fest in El Reno. Held just off the iconic Route 66 at the Canadian County Expo Center, this aviation event offers a dynamic mix of sky shows and experiences for all ages.

LOCATION: Stoney Creek Hotel, 200 W Albany St., Broken Arrow, OK. **Note:** Hosted by Magic Empire Coin Club www.oklahomanumismatic.org . Friday, Sept 5th, Noon - 6 pm - Saturday, Sept 6th 9 am - 5 pm - Sunday, Sept 7th, 9 am - 2 pm. FREE ENTRY!

EDITORS NOTE: Be sure to email your events celebration information to be included in our September issue of Oklahoma's Veteran News! Listing are free, and based on space available.

Sep 6, 2025 - Hooker Car Show
LOCATION: 108 E Glaydas Hooker, OK 73945 **Note:** Head to downtown Hooker to see more than 200 cars participate in the annual Hooker Car Show. Classic and new automobiles will be showcased at this fun event perfect for families.

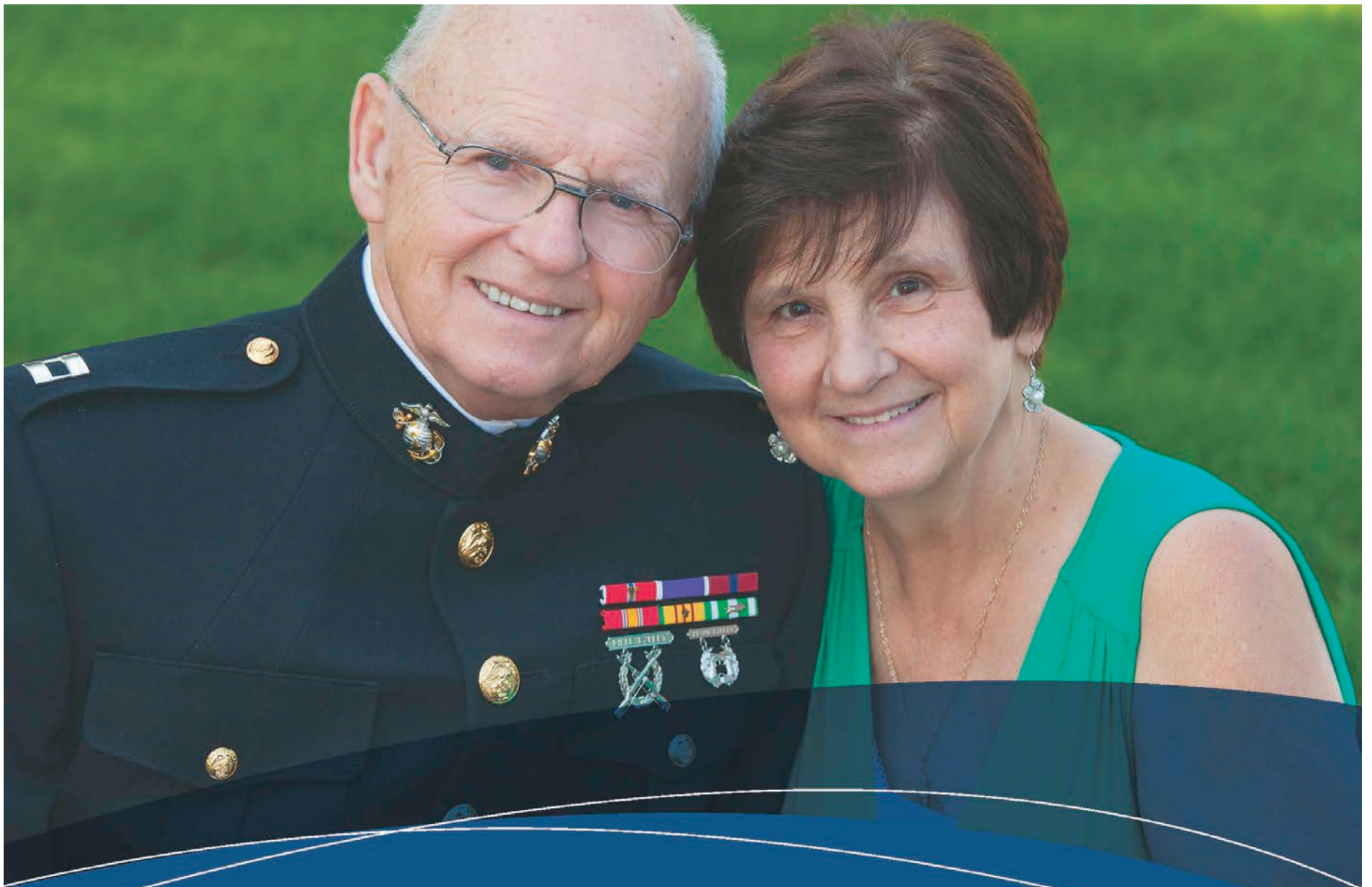
Sep 12, 2025 - Sep 13, 2025 - Atoka Point Race LOCATION: Atoka Motorsports Park Atoka, OK 74525 **Note:** Experience the heart-pounding action of live racing during the Atoka Points Race at the Atoka Motorsports Park. Drivers from across the country will gather for exciting drag racing on the dirt track

Sep 13, 2025 - Redbud Rumble
LOCATION: Redbud Festival Park
109 N Main St Owasso, OK 74055 **Note:**
Head to Owasso's Redbud Festival Park
for the Redbud Rumble this summer. This
free event features a car show, a Marble
Run hosted by Owasso Masonic Lodge
#545, live music, food and other vendors,
a kids' zone, and much more.

Sep 18, 2025 - Cruise-In for a Cause
LOCATION: Main St Yukon, OK 73099
Note: Head to Main Street in Yukon for Cruise-In for a Cause this September. This free event is a unique opportunity to cruise along the historic Route 66 as participants gather to support charitable causes.

Sep 18, 2025 - Sep 19, 2025 - Sep 21, 2025
LOCATION: Mustang Wildhorse Park
1201 N Mustang Park Mustang, OK
73064 **Note:** See Volkswagens from
their earliest makes and models to their
newest editions at the Old Volks Show in
Mustang's Wild Horse Park.





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Efforts Underway For Bethany Veterans Plaza

The Bethany Improvement Foundation is raising funds to help build and complete the Bethany Veterans Plaza.

The Bethany Improvement Foundation is raising funds to help build and complete the Bethany Veterans Plaza.

This initiative is entirely community-funded, community-designed, and community-driven. It reflects a shared commitment to honoring those who served and strengthening the bonds within their city.

Southern Nazarene University donated the northwest side of Donald Street and NW 39th Expressway (Route 66) for the placement of the plaza.

The Veteran's Plaza was designed by local sculptor, Scott Stearman, to honor all members of the Armed Services.

"The thing that motivated me about the Veterans Plaza was being a member of this community in that this is where I have my business, this is where I have my home, it's where I went to college," Stearman said. "The idea of the Veterans Plaza really started when (former) Mayor KP Westmoreland called me and asked me about creating something for the city of Bethany. But as more of us came together and started dreaming about what it could look like, it really became more than just a Bethany place. This became (original name) Route 66 Oklahoma Veterans Monument. It will be a place that will invite people to visit, a place to honor, service, and sacrifice, and patriotism."

Stearman said the purpose of this plaza is to invite you to step into the stories of those that have served.

"The stories of those who served are going to be presented," he said. "Of course, there will be a big central sculpture that will represent different eras and different genders and different ethnic groups that have been represented in our military service branches."

He continued, "One of the aspects that I'm really excited about incorporating into this is there will be a place for you to read excerpts from letters that were taken. Words that were taken from the battlefield, words that were sent back home to families and spouses, to children. The text will be captured in a little bronze plaque, and you'll read a letter from someone. Letters from World War I, letters from World War II, Vietnam, letters from Desert Storm. It's going to be positioned in a circle as it goes around the central sculpture."

Stearman said the Veterans Plaza will be a place to appreciate and treasure what service and sacrifice means.

"We will have seen their words, and we will have an understanding of what that is all about," he said. "I've talked about this place to be a tribute to veterans and to the families and



The Bethany Improvement Foundation is raising funds to help build and complete the Bethany Veterans Plaza.

friends of veterans who sacrificed as well. It's not really a memorial. This is a veteran's plaza that will be a tribute."

Stearman said there will be a memorial aspect to the plaza.

"Set off to the side, a little bit behind the main plaza with the big center sculpture and the wall and the letters and the bronze plaques and all the words will be an area that is a memorial for the fallen from Oklahoma who have died in the global war on terrorism," he said.

He continued "We don't think this exists anywhere in the state of Oklahoma. This will be the first place in the state of Oklahoma where all the names of the fallen in the war on terror will be listed on one wall. These are Oklahomans who have died in service since 9/11. They'll be etched on a black granite wall. It'll be very much like the Vietnam Wall where folks will be able to do a rubbing, they'll be able to put a piece of paper up there and rub it and get an impression of what that name is on the wall."

Stearman said standing in front of that wall will be a sculpture.

"It is a life-size sculpture of a little girl, five years old, literally 39 inches tall, and she's standing in front of that wall of names and she's going to be holding a folded flag. That's all we're going to know," he said. "When we walk up to this sacred place, we'll see this little girl looking at a wall of names holding a folded flag, and we will complete the story. The truth is, she represents us. She represents our community. She represents families and friends who've sent loved ones into harm's way, and now she stands in this silent tribute looking at a wall of names."

He added, "We'll fill in the blanks on the story, but she will present a beautiful truth that the citizens of Oklahoma have a great debt and have experienced a great loss, because someone they loved, their name is on that wall. So that's the memorial aspect of it."

Stearman said the Veterans Plaza will include three sculptures.

"Three sculptures will be against the sky as you drive by. A Vietnam frontline surgical trauma nurse, a World War II/Korean War veteran, and standing in the center will be a modern-day desert warrior, and the two from previous eras and previous wars will have their hand on his shoulder," he said. "It will be a previous generation supporting the active-duty soldier today. There's a continuation of the call to arms that a nation has extended to its citizens or call to arms to go to battle. This is a place to honor those who have answered the call."

Lawrence A. Ross, committee member of the Bethany Improvement Foundation, said he remains hopeful the first phase of the plaza can be approved by the end of the year by the Bethany City Council.

"I'm still hopeful that by the end of the year, the city council will have said yes, and I can begin looking for contractors and hopefully these angel donors will come out of the woods who I'm told are just waiting for full city approval for our location," he said.

Donations are being solicited and should be sent to Priscilla Cude, Treasurer, Bethany Improvement Foundation, P.O. Box 218, Bethany, OK 73008. Payable to Bethany Improvement Foundation, which is a 501-c-3 charitable contribution. ● By Van Mitchell, Staff Writer

Chaplain's Corner

Amazing Connections: *Brothers in Christ*

I am Cord Fowler, a US Navy veteran, Husband, Father, and Grandfather here in Oklahoma City. I am an eternally grateful follower of Jesus Christ and very happily married to my wife of 38 years, Kim. I know there are plenty of wonderful wives and mothers out there, but God gave me the best one!

In 1990, I was 5 years into my Navy career, working as an Electronics Technician 2nd class Petty Officer on the USS Tarawa (LHA-1). The Tarawa was an amphibious assault ship, carrying helicopters, landing craft, Marines, and equipment for amphibious operations. We deployed during Operation Desert Storm to transport Marines to the Persian Gulf in support of that successful operation.

After my separation from the Navy, I stayed in the technology field for several years, but God had a new plan for my life. I enrolled in Southwestern Christian University in Bethany, OK where I earned a BS in Biblical Leadership. That led to a new career as a Hospice Chaplain. Becoming a Hospice Chaplain has become one of the most challenging and rewarding chapters of my life! I have had the opportunity to meet so many amazing people at the end of their journey here on earth and have celebrated with them their expectation and hope and what comes next because of Jesus.

One of my most memorable clients was a US Navy veteran who served during World War II. At the time he was transporting marines in the invasion of Guam and the Tarawa atoll. What an amazing coincidence, I served on the very ship named after the Battle of Tarawa he was in Thanksgiving week November 1943. He was piloting a landing craft full of marines headed toward Tarawa. Approximately 150 yards away from the shore, the craft stopped abruptly. It had run aground on the coral reef tearing a hole in the bottom of the craft. He put the throttle at full thrust with no avail. He then tried going backwards with no luck. They were stuck! He described that they were under heavy machine gun and mortar fire. The Marine Sergeant in charge of the squad in the boat shouted at him, "Squid! You need to get us the hell out of here!" My client shouted back, "We're stuck, I can't move us!" The Marine ordered everyone, "Out of the boat! Go over the side!" all the while receiving intense small arms fire and explosions all around them.

As soon as all the Marines had left his craft, it became lighter, and he was able to back up off the reef and attempted to return to the ship. He was taking on water and didn't think he could make it back. Despite the damage he made it back, only to see multiple landing craft in line waiting to be recovered. He piloted his craft to the front of the line when the operations chief on the ship deck ordered him to the back of the line. He shouted back at the chief, "There is a hole in the



By Cord Fowler, Chaplain: Legacy Family Hospice with Kim Fowler.

bottom of my boat and I'm taking on water. If you don't pull me out now, you'll need to recover the boat from the bottom of the sea!" The chief ordered that his boat be brought aboard next. He thankfully lived to tell this story to his mates, family members and now me!

I love the shared stories of our service, because we all seem to have examples of these amazing connections, even with those we never served with. That Navy veteran and I became trusted friends, brothers in arms, and brothers in Christ. Our lives are blessed by shared service, a shared Savior, and a shared hope of heaven. ●

By Cord Fowler, Chaplain: Legacy Family Hospice



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A Snapshot of Heroism from Ivan W. Evans Jr. - Gone but never Forgotten



U.S. Army 100th Division infantryman Ivan W. Evans Jr. proudly created this display of his Combat Infantryman Badge, Bronze Star and Purple Heart from WWII.

Ivan W. Evans Jr, his voice resonating with the echoes of war in October 2023, recounted his 186 days of continuous battle at the end of World War II in France and Germany. His U.S. Army infantry fighting experiences, etched in the annals of history, were as intense as the widely known Battle of the Bulge.

Just out of high school, he joined the famous 100th Infantry Division after 16 weeks of training as a replacement soldier in early November 1944 in the rugged forested terrain of the French Vosges Mountains. The mountains and savage winter weather acted as a nearly impenetrable fortress for German troops determined to defend the final barrier between the Allies and the Rhine River.

Evans explained how his 100th Division, known as the Century Division withstood Hitler's last major offensive of the war, Operation Nordwind. This operation, launched by the German Army in a desperate attempt to regain the initiative on the Western Front, was every bit as tenacious and massive an onslaught as the failed Battle of the Bulge.

He spoke with awe of how difficult it was to push the Germans out of the concrete Maginot Line fortifications, a series of defensive structures built by France to protect against a German invasion. However, these fortifications were oriented to defend France from Germany to the North,

making the fighting a fierce and yet strange experience, as he described to me in the interviews.

The Germans' Operation Nordwind took place in severe winter weather about 60 days after Evans went into the frontlines as a .30-cal light machine gunner. A four-man crew supported his weapon. Three soldiers helped him to move the weapon, its tripod and its heavy boxes of ammo.

He said he was lucky to have those first two months to orient himself to fighting Germans as part of the Century Division's effort to drive the Germans out of France.

By then, he knew to dig a deep, defendable foxhole for himself, his ammo helper and his weapon as a gun emplacement.

He also requisitioned an M1 carbine instead of the .45-caliber sidearm machine gunners were issued. He did this once he realized how fierce the fighting was, in that often below-freezing snowy winter.

Both those things saved his life when the Germans halted their tactical retreat and launched their offensive Operation Nordwind at his position.

His training allowed him to capture a German making a nighttime infiltration bayonet charge. The enemy was attempting to surprise the Americans by quietly sneaking up close and appearing out of the fog, making a bayonet charge.

What followed in the interview was a testament to Evans' strategic thinking. He demonstrated how he outmaneuvered an on-charging German soldier in the dark, a situation that demanded split-second decisions and quick reflexes.

While seated, he showed me how his reaction was to turn his body sideways, reaching back to grab his M1 carbine propped to the back side of the foxhole. He did that because he would have never had time to use his machine gun.

In turning and reaching back, he did not present a fixed target for the German's bayonet aimed at his chest. The German missed him; the bayonet slid across the front of his uniform and downward because his foxhole was strategically deep.

In missing such an obvious target, the German lost his balance, stumbling forward. Evans was able to grab the German's rifle that had just luckily gone past him and pull him further downward into the foxhole, where his hand-to-hand combat training took over.

He quickly subdued his enemy and captured him without injury by using the soldier's rifle as leverage in striking him hard across the face with the butt of the rifle.

Meanwhile, his ammo crew member did the same to another German charging in. Evans said his foxhole mate required more hand-to-hand combat strikes to subdue his German.

Both men were awarded Bronze Stars for their gallantry in capturing Germans that night, as their actions exemplified what was taking place all across the battlefield during Operation Nordwind. The Germans made their last major offensive on the Western Front, but the well-trained and battle-tested Century Division absorbed the blow and repelled their advance.

Soon, the Germans' offensive fell apart. The 100th Division returned to normal operations, continuing to push the Germans back into Germany and toward the end of the war. Evans mentioned the difference in being a replacement in the Century Division many times during our interviews, only joining them for those last 186 days of almost continuous fighting in sometimes heavily forested, snowy and windswept conditions.



WWII

He did this all the while swelling with pride that his leadership in his gun crew and his .30-caliber Browning machine gun made a significant contribution to protecting his fellow soldiers.

Evans, a man of humble courage, acknowledged the role of luck in his survival during the daily battles. His perspective sheds light on the unpredictable nature of war, where a split-second decision or a fortunate circumstance can mean the difference between life and death.

Evans said he was lucky during all that daily battle. Later, when he was shot in the arm near the Maginot Line while retaking Bitche. He said he was lucky it was only his arm that earned him a Purple Heart Medal.

And then real luck kicked in when his wound was sewn up by the only neurosurgeon available in the MASH unit behind the lines because of his fortunate placement in line at triage.

He regained the full use of his arm because that surgeon knew precisely how to treat the nerves carefully during surgery.

After recovery, he rejoined his unit and continued to contribute to the war effort, as his place in his unit was solidly welcomed.

No longer just a replacement nobody knew, he was well respected as a key part of the men's success in battle after battle.

With only 16 weeks of training, Evans made sure that the sentiment of acceptance and its significance to him were emphasized in the interviews.

Evans said one of the most fulfilling aspects of his role as a machine gunner was protecting and directly affecting his fellow soldiers' ability to carry the fight to the

enemy. He did this right on into Germany, only coming out of the frontline in the last two weeks of the war near Stuttgart.

He said he was proud when he could be creative in moving his weapon to a better position to give him a better view of the battlefield for any defensive purposes, while simultaneously supporting his unit's forward progress. Those battlefield initiatives became more routine as he gained experience, as he was deeply invested in his weapon making a difference.

Sharing these interviews as a brief reflection of the bravery of an Oklahoman is fitting now to honor his generation on the 80th anniversary of the end of World War II. By only sharing the details of the battles, readers are encouraged to remember the everyday bravery shown by fellow Americans in that war.

Evans was born April 26, 1925, near Bessie, Oklahoma and died on November 25, 2023, in Yukon, only two months after these interviews. He was buried in the Ft. Sill National Cemetery, Elgin, Oklahoma. ● *Story and photos by Darl DeVault, contributing editor*



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Pratt & Whitney Oklahoma City Recognized by American Legion



Pratt & Whitney Oklahoma City has been selected as the 2025 “Employer of Veterans” (Large Employer) by the American Legion Department of Oklahoma. The award recognizes the company’s strong support of veteran employees and its commitment to hiring and retaining those who have served in the military. Pratt & Whitney is an RTX business.

The award was presented on Saturday, July 12, during the American Legion Department of Oklahoma Convention in Shawnee, Oklahoma.

“Veterans bring unique skills, perspectives and leadership to our team,” said Greg Treacy, vice president, Pratt & Whitney Oklahoma City. “We’re proud to support them-not only during their time in uniform, but throughout their careers with us.”

Earlier this year, three Pratt & Whitney OKC leaders received the Secretary of Defense Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve (ESGR) Patriot Award during an employee event. That same nomination was shared with the American Legion by the ESGR State Chair, leading to the site’s selection for this statewide recognition.

The recognition reflects Pratt & Whitney OKC’s ongoing efforts to create a workplace where those who have served-and continue to serve-can thrive.



Greg Treacy, vice president, Pratt & Whitney Oklahoma City, accepting the Employer of Veterans Award at the American Legion Department of Oklahoma Convention.



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—Veterans Post— Community Care Extended

Veterans who receive community care for medical treatment have been required in the past to seek and receive new referrals every 90 to 180 days. Just getting that referral or authorization can cause delays in treatment. Now, with changes at the VA, those referrals won't be as frequent.

Starting now, in 30 different categories of medical care, referrals and new authorizations will only be required once a year.

Community care can literally be a lifesaver for veterans who live too far from a VA medical facility, whose closest facility doesn't provide the medical care that's required or if the VA's wait times are not acceptable.

Here are a few of the 30 medical categories that are now eligible for the longer authorization: cardiology, oncology, gastroenterology, pain management and pulmonary.

If you've been getting community medical care and are subject to the need for frequent reauthorizations, contact the Community Care office at your closest VA medical center to ask how the new rule impacts the schedule you'll be on going forward. Ask whether the new "year" began when your current authorization period did, or whether a new year begins right now. Get the answer in writing, if you can. Take the steps you need to, to guarantee that your

authorization is indeed extended so you don't discover at the last minute that there's been a problem and that your file was overlooked.

If you'd like to take advantage of community care, you need to be enrolled in VA health care or be eligible for it.

If you're getting VA care, tell your VA physician that you'd like to get community care. If they think it's appropriate, they will start a referral.

Once you find a civilian community care provider that you like, be sure to verify that they're part of the VA's network before you get any treatment from them, otherwise VA won't pay for it.

To learn more about community care or to find a provider in your area, go online to www.va.gov/communitycare. ●

By Freddy Groves

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North Oklahoma City VA Clinic

14400 Bogert Parkway, Suite 100
Oklahoma City, OK 73134-2653
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Mental health care: **405-302-1500**

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EDUCATION

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<https://okhighered.org/student-vets/>

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Oklahoma Veterans United

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<https://okvetunited.org>



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oklahomanumismatic.org

DEALER SETUP THURSDAY SEPT 4TH, 3PM-6PM
EARLY BIRD FRIDAY SEPT 5TH, 8-10 \$50

FRIDAY SEPT 5TH, NOON-6PM
SATURDAY SEPT 6TH, 9AM-5PM
SUNDAY SEPT 7TH, 9AM-2PM
LOCATION:

Stoney Creek Hotel, 200 W Albany Street, Broken Arrow OK

FREE ENTRY!

Bourse Chairman

Bill Norfleet

Phone: 405-990-4411

Email: billnorfleet@hotmail.com

Assistant Bourse Chairman

Tim O'Keefe

Phone: 918-697-8348

Email: union213@aol.com

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60% - Lifetime Oklahoma Hunting and Fishing License

70% - Live in a State Veterans Home at NO COST for long-term care - you keep all of your income

100% - Tax Exemptions - this may include Sales Tax, Excise Tax, and Property Tax. Also includes a FREE Drivers License

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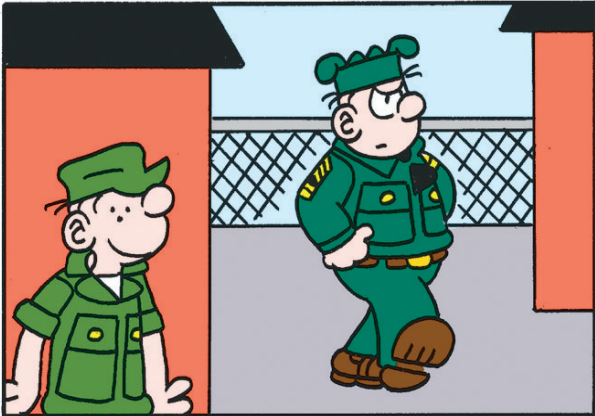
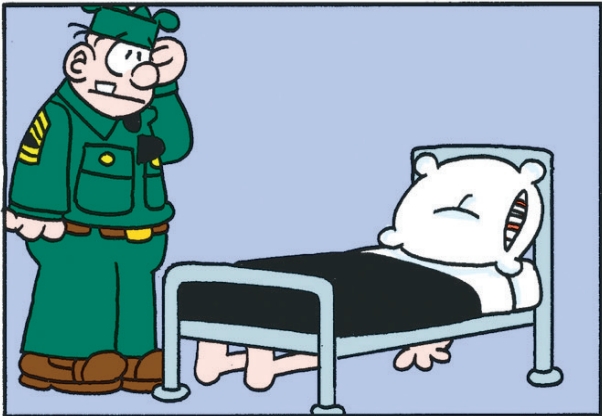
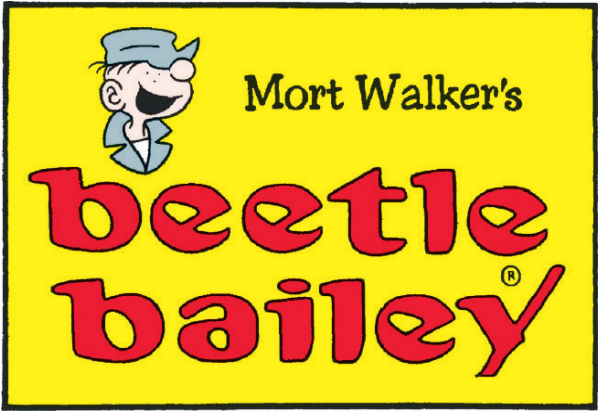
World War 2

Manchuria
aggression
Soviet Union
Axis
Nagasaki
Germany
Pacific
Manhattan
United States
Nuremberg
Hiroshima
Araki
Casualties
Pearl Harbor

Little Boy
Japan
Hitler
Rationing
Poland
Fat Man
Italy

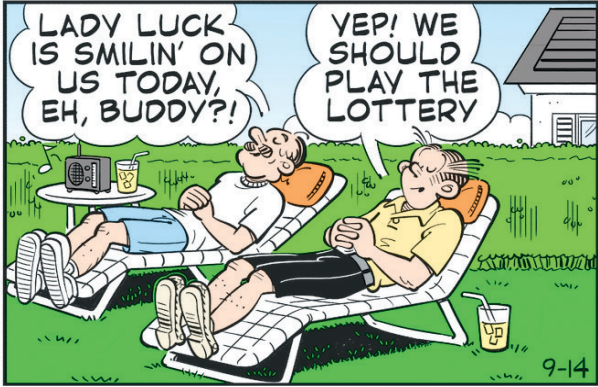
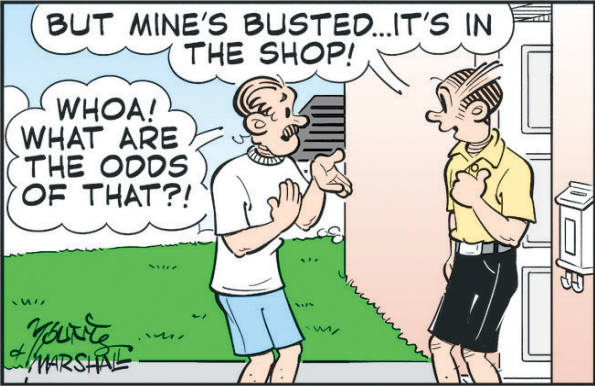
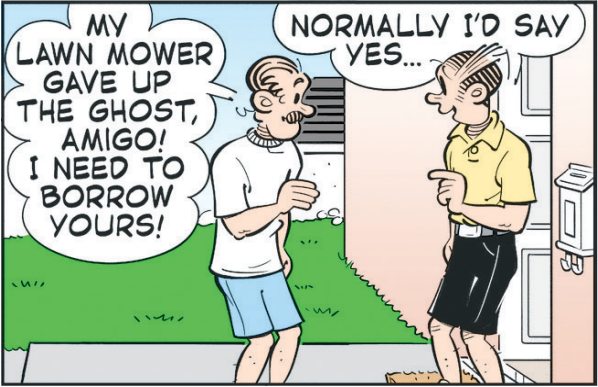
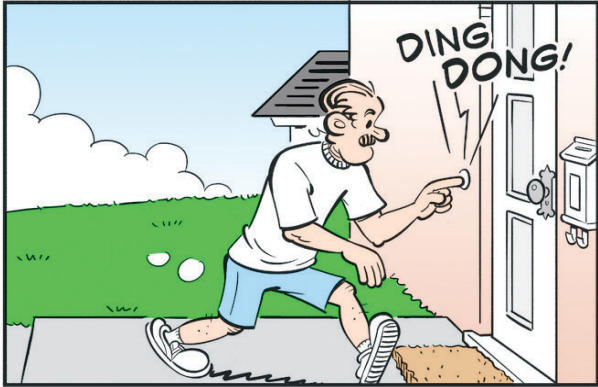
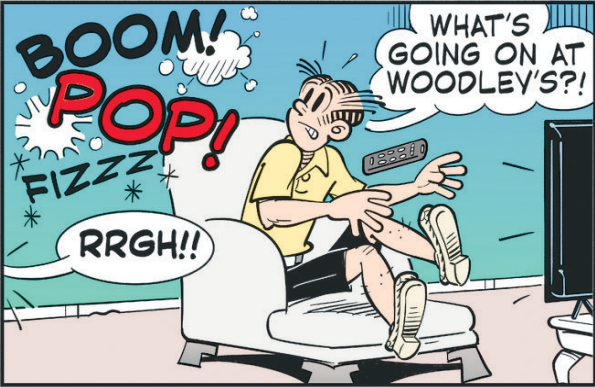
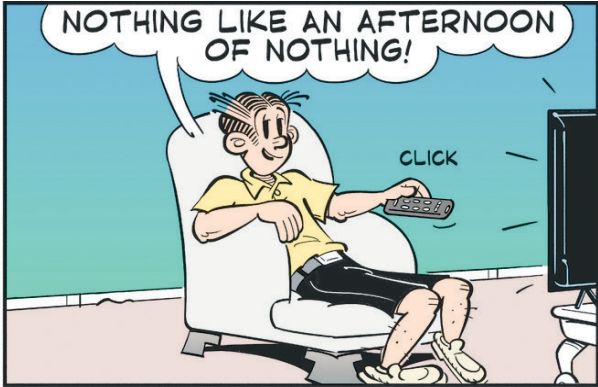
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Q I B B M F A H A E R G N I N O I T A R M L S S
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N U F T Z K L L T U E G O J G G R W G K N H M C
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Serving Active Duty Military, Veterans and Their Families



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