

OKLAHOMA VETERAN NEWS MAGAZINE

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OKLAHOMA VETERAN NEWSMAGAZINE
Serving Active Duty Military, Veterans and Their Families

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MORE INSIDE

On The Cover: Charles (Ray) Bachlor was a WWII Korean and Cold War veteran. He went from Private to Colonel during his 34-year career. Pictured here at 98 years old.

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On the Cover: From U-Boat Attacks to Army Wings

The Charles Bachlor's WWII Story

Charles "Ray" Bachlor, born in Tulsa in 1927, spent part of his teenage years in Houma, Louisiana, between 1940 and 1942, attending high school as a sophomore and junior. His family moved frequently. "We followed the oil fields," he recalled. His father, Roy, managed a supply store for an oil field supply company. Located 57 miles southwest of New Orleans on the Gulf of Mexico, Houma was a quiet oil town-until the war arrived.

A 'secret' war on the Gulf

During WWII, German U-boats prowled the Gulf of Mexico. "Houma soon found itself in the midst of a 'secret' war-one in which one or more oil tankers were being torpedoed each week near Wine Island after being loaded with oil," wrote Bachlor after the war. "The 'U-boat' would fire an explosive torpedo to spread the oil and then an incendiary to light it. Merchant seamen would have to dive into the burning oil. Sometimes the sub would surface and machine gun survivors. Those who managed to survive... were picked up by our shrimp boats and brought to the hospitals in Houma and Morgan City."

"Ellender Hospital in Houma was overwhelmed, and folding cots covered the grounds outside the hospital. The sweet smell of burning flesh permeated the air long before you reached the hospital. Women of the town-including my mother-volunteered to help the overworked hospital staff."

Kimberly Guise, a curator at the National WWII Museum, confirmed these accounts. Bachlor recorded a grim tally: between 1942 and 1943, 88 tankers sunk and 1,471 dead-Americans killed just offshore.

Back to Tulsa

Bachlor finished high school in Sand Springs in 1943 and briefly attended Tulsa University. He tried to enlist in the Navy but was drafted into the U.S. Army on March 1, 1945, as a private.

Basic training

He began basic infantry training at Camp Livingston, Louisiana, in March for seven weeks. One day, a paratrooper visited. The man's appearance and the unique duty of an elite organization intrigued him. "I was afraid of heights so I joined the paratroopers to overcome that fear," Bachlor admitted.

Paratrooper training

Transferred to Fort Benning, Georgia, he entered paratrooper training. "Our first week was in the sawdust pits where we were doing nothing but PT. Fifty minutes of PT and 10 minutes rest and 50 minutes more... And every day we'd go on long runs."

The second week brought a new challenge: "We were jumping from a 34-foot tower... the scariest of all, because you dropped 34 feet and then this cable caught you after (falling 19 feet), then you go down a line to a sawdust pit." All this to overcome a fear of heights!

By the third week, they were packing their own parachutes and, "We'd hang harnesses and learn to guide ourselves, pulling on our shroud lines." That week, they were also dropped from 250-foot towers.

"Fourth week we jumped every day. And then we made a night jump and then we got our wings... So, we had to make two marches in combat situations and C-47 to come in, picked us up, and we would make a simulated combat jump. And, so then you graduated."

The war ends

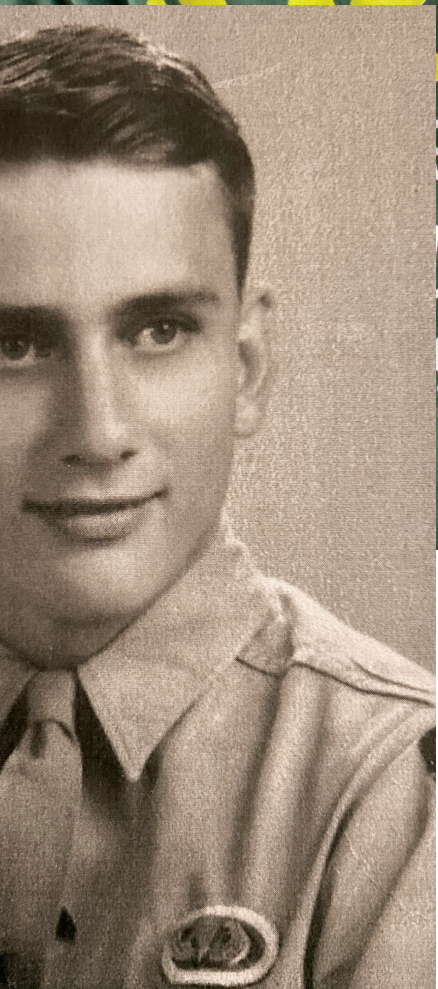
Bachlor trained for a possible airborne assault on Japan. Then, the United States demolished Hiroshima on August 6 and Nagasaki on August 9, 1945, with atomic bombs. National leaders wanted to avoid at least 500,000 American casualties during a land invasion of Japan. "There were a lot of people that were in the military that were happy about dropping the bomb... and I think it was only later that a lot of people had second thoughts about how terrible the bomb was... but in the end run, it saved a lot of lives," he said. "It shortened the war."

Japan officially surrendered on September 2, 1945. Bachlor's orders to join the 13th Parachute Division at Fort Lewis were canceled. Instead, he remained at Fort Benning as a parachute school instructor, earning the rank of Staff Sergeant.

A Long military career

After leaving the Army in 1948, Bachlor earned an Engineering Physics degree, was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant in 1950 and taught infantry basic training at





Charles (Ray) Bachlor was a WWII Korean and Cold War veteran. He went from Private to Colonel during his 34-year career. Pictured here at 98 years old.

Inset: Charles (Ray) Bachlor, shown here at age 19 as a WWII paratrooper in the US Army.

Fort Chaffey, Arkansas, until May 1951. He later worked for the Security Advisory Group-Japan from 1952-1954 and taught at the Command & General Staff College, Ft. McArthur, Calif.

When Colonel Bachlor retired in 1979, he had served 34 years—rising from private to colonel, an achievement few attain. His life story stands as a testament to courage and dedication. He lives in Tulsa. ●
story and photos by Lt Col Richard Stephens, Jr., USAFR, Ret.



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AROUND THE STATE

Stafford Museum: Journey From Wright Flyer to the Moon

Weatherford's Stafford Air and Space Museum, located at 3000 Logan Road near historic Route 66, offers visitors an extraordinary journey through aviation and space exploration.



Museum-quality, flyable replica of the Wright Flyer at Weatherford's Stafford

of 18,000 parts - offers a tangible link to his historic mission in May 1969.

From airplanes to space craft
Weatherford's Stafford Air and Space Museum, located at 3000 Logan Road near historic Route 66, offers visitors an extraordinary journey through aviation and space exploration. Its packed galleries showcase rockets, aircraft, space suits, engines, and other artifacts - many connected to Oklahoma's celebrated astronaut, Lieutenant General Thomas Stafford. The museum traces the story of flight from the Wright Brothers to the moon landings, with more than 50 American and Soviet technological achievements arranged in rough chronological order. Plan at least two hours to take it all in. Let's blast off.

The world of controlled, heavier-than-air powered flights started on December 17, 1903, when the Wright Brothers flew the Wright Flyer. A full-scale replica can be seen as well as other early aircraft like an actual Sopwith Pup and replicas of a Bleriot XI, Curtiss Pusher, and Charles Lindbergh's Spirit of St. Louis. Visitors can use a "Star Tour Guide" handout to learn about each exhibit. Reflecting on the rapid pace of progress, Doug Schones of Canute remarked, "From 1903 to 1969, such a short time (one life time), so much technology."

Rockets and Engines Take Center Stage
The heart of the museum lies in its space exhibits. Among them is an actual German WWII V-2 rocket, as well as F-1, J-2, and Soviet NK-33 engines. The mighty Saturn V moon rocket required five F-1 Rocketdyne engines, producing 7.6 million pounds of thrust, to send astronauts to the moon. A Titan II rocket, the same type Stafford rode into orbit during his Gemini 6 and 9 missions in 1965 and 1966, respectfully, is also displayed. Interactive exhibits let visitors hear-and almost feel - the immense power of rockets.

Houston's Johnson Space Center
contributed an authentic Mission Control Console used from the Gemini program through the Apollo, Skylab, Apollo-Soyuz, and the early Shuttle eras. Another highlight is the actual Gemini 6A spacecraft that Stafford and Wally Schirra flew during the first-ever rendezvous in space with Gemini 7 on December 15, 1965.

A towering, full-scale replica of the Apollo 11 Lunar Module (LM) "Eagle" is displayed. In 1969, Neil Armstrong and Edwin Aldrin, Jr. piloted a LM like this to become the first humans to walk on the moon. Nearby, Stafford's Apollo 10 spacesuit - composed

International Space Station
Space Station fans will enjoy seeing a 1/24th scale model that illustrates the complexity of the orbiting laboratory. Interactive displays explain its components and the multinational crews who have lived and worked aboard. Viewing the model, Angela Correll of Ponca City observed, "This (ISS) is what keeps us connected" because astronauts from many nations share the station. Visitors are encouraged to download the "Spot the Station" smartphone app to track its path overhead.

Cold War and Modern Aircraft
The museum has an impressive collection of fighter airplanes. Outside are four and inside, visitors encounter an F-86 "Sabre," Soviet MIG-21R "Fishbed," T-38 "Talon," F-16 "Fighting Falcon" and 2024's addition, a F-117A "Nighthawk" stealth fighter. The MIG-21R served as the Soviet Bloc's front-line fighter during the Cold War. The F-117A, a stealth fighter which Stafford helped develop, flew combat sorties during Operation Desert Storm, Allied Force and Iraqi Freedom, according to the Star Tour Guide.

Honoring Thomas Stafford
General Stafford was born and raised in Weatherford. The museum's website notes, "His mother came to Oklahoma in a covered wagon and lived to see her only child fly to the moon."



Air and Space Museum.

His father was a dentist who taught his son to appreciate what he had by working hard for it." With a lot of hard work and natural abilities, Stafford graduated at the top 10% of his class at the U.S. Naval Academy and later became "Chief of Astronauts at NASA, was appointed Head of Research and Development at the Pentagon, chaired the team that developed the Hubble instrument COSTAR (Corrective Optics Space Telescope Axial Replacement), worked at Area 51, and (was) responsible for Stealth Technology as we know it today." His career included four historic space missions: Gemini 6A, Gemini 9, Apollo 10, and Apollo-Soyuz, where he commanded Apollo's final flight. Lieutenant General Stafford lived from September 17, 1930 - March 18, 2024, reaching the age of 93.

Completing the Visit
Open seven days a week, the Stafford Air and Space Museum, blends history, technology, and human achievement into an unforgettable experience. Note. Museum personnel did not respond to requests for an interview. ● story and photos by Lt Col Richard Stephens, Jr., USAFR, Ret.



The prime crews of the joint Apollo Soyuz mission 1975. Photo by NASA (002)



Top: Flight suit, awards, and accomplishments of General Stafford in the Stafford Gallery.

Fortified Roofing: A Smarter Roof for Oklahoma Homes and Veterans

A new roof is one of the biggest expenses a homeowner will ever face-often the single most expensive replacement on a home.

What many Oklahomans don't realize is that the **Oklahoma Insurance Commission** underwrites a program that can provide up to a **\$10,000 grant** for homeowners who install a **FORTIFIED roof**. The program is called the Strengthen Oklahoma Homes Program. Information can be found online at <https://www.ok.org/>, or by searching "Strengthen Oklahoma Homes" using voice search on your phone.

A FORTIFIED roof may realistically be a lifetime roof. When properly installed, **30 years or more of service life** is a reasonable expectation.

My name is **Jack Werner**. I've been in construction for **50 years**, hold a **degree in construction**, and own **A to Z Inspections**. In my professional opinion, the two most important advancements in residential construction over the last 50 years are **Insulated Concrete Forms (ICFs)** and the **FORTIFIED building program**.

A FORTIFIED roof meets standards developed and tested by the **Insurance Institute for Business & Home Safety**. These standards are based on years of research into **high wind and hail performance**. Simply put, it is the toughest

composition roof a homeowner can install.

As just one example out of hundreds of required details:

Standard roofs typically use OSB or plywood decking fastened at wider intervals. A FORTIFIED roof requires roof decking to be fastened to rafters **every 4 inches using #8 screw-shank nails**. That dramatically improves wind uplift resistance-and that's only one of many enhanced requirements.

Will \$10,000 pay for a new roof?

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However, on a **small, single-story home**, roughly **1,000 square feet**, with decking already in good condition, it is possible. Even when it doesn't cover the full cost, the grant typically represents a **substantial portion of the expense**.

As a veteran myself, I want to be sure **Oklahoma veterans are fully aware of this opportunity**.

For additional information, I can be reached at **405-412-7861**.

Jack Werner served with the 4th Infantry Division, K Company, 75th Airborne Rangers, completing two tours in Vietnam. Each of his sons has also served in the United States military. Jack holds a degree in construction and is the owner of A to Z Inspections. Jack Werner - atozinspections@yahoo.com. For additional information, I can be reached at 405-412-7861.



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Rock Garden Provides Inspirational Messages for Veterans, Families.

Patricia Hocker is on a mission to give inspiration to Veterans and their families while at the Oklahoma City VA Medical Center, located at 921 NE 13th Street.

She is doing so via a rock garden that features painted rocks with inspirational messages.

“Four years ago, I became the chairman of the Salvation Army Women’s Auxiliary Veterans committee. The Veteran’s committee is a national outreach for the Salvation Army,” she said. “When I went down to the VA Hospital, I thought it looked bleak and not very welcoming. There was a small sign in an area surrounded by some bushes. It said, “take a rock and leave a rock for inspiration.” One of the hospital staff came by when I was there. She told me that occupational therapy did this for a few years, but they were no longer doing it. I knew then that I had to do something about that.”

Hocker said she asked three of her friends, Teta Turner, Shirley

Brummett, and Becky Evans to help her.

“Shirley and Becky are artists and Teta and I do the best we can. I also invited ladies from our Salvation Women’s Auxiliary to help with the painting. My Bible study group also paints,” Hocker said. “I supply all the paint, rocks, and ideas for painting. I’m always happy when someone walks up to me with a box of painted rocks. We now have some “rock fairies” who leave painted rocks.”

Hocker said last year they purchased an attractive metal sign to go in the garden.

“I try to get down every 2 to 3 weeks to “plant” new rocks. When I get there, the garden is bare. It’s a challenge to keep the garden planted,” she said. “It has become a mission for Shirley, Becky, and I. It is a blessing for us as we bless our Veterans and their families. Whenever we are down there, we hear beautiful stories about what the rocks mean to that person or a loved one.”

Turner and her friends all previously worked together at Windsor Hills Elementary School in the Putnam City school district.

“We all worked in and we ended our careers at Windsor Hills,” she said.

Turner said she got involved with the VA Rock Garden after a close friend passed away while in the Oklahoma City VA Hospital.

“What frankly got me involved directly in it is two years ago on New Year’s Day we had a very close friend who died at the Veterans Hospital, and that’s when I began to get inspired to do something for the people who come down there,” she said. “The garden was already going, but I had gone down to see him. And then when he passed away, of course, I wanted to do my part. And the rocks are not just for the Vets but for their families too.”

Turner said being a part of the VA rock garden has been a blessing.

“It became such a joyful mission that we’ve carried it on now for at least two years. And we can hardly keep rocks in there. They disappear so quickly. They give people a lot of joy,” she said. ● by Van Mitchell, staff writer



The Oklahoma City VA Hospital features a rock garden filled with painted rocks with inspirational messages.



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Modest Governor Henry Bellmon Remembered

Marine Corps First Lieutenant Henry Louis Bellmon displayed heroism and leadership as a tank platoon commander during four WWII Pacific Island landings. He earned a Silver Star for bravery and inspired admiration among infantrymen who could draw water from his tank platoon.

He served one term as an Oklahoma State Legislator from 1946 to 1948 before a prolific career that included serving as Oklahoma's first Republican Governor and U.S. Senator. He was governor from 1963 to 1967. Under Oklahoma law at the time, he was not allowed to run for a second term. He was then elected twice as U.S. Senator from Oklahoma, serving from 1968 to 1980, when he chose not to run again. In 1986, he was re-elected as governor, a position he held until 1990. Born in 1921, he seldom, if ever, discussed his gallant service during campaigns.

Bellmon first caught his superiors' attention during his initial tank-commanding training in the United States, where he demonstrated mechanical skills he had learned on the family homestead in Billings, Oklahoma. When his M4 Sherman tank lost a track, he instructed his driver to move forward and backward slowly, and two crew members used hand tools to quickly realign the track back on.

After observing his ingenuity during training, Captain Robert M. Neiman, who took command of the forming Company C, 4th Tank Battalion, chose Second Lt. Bellmon as a platoon leader. A recent graduate of Oklahoma A&M College (now Oklahoma State University), he was soon training as a platoon leader of five tanks.

As members of the 4th Marine Division, his platoon took part in four major amphibious landings across the Central Pacific, ending with intense fighting in the battle for Iwo Jima.

Tanks served as infantry support weapons in the rugged island and jungle terrain. Their firepower helped the infantry counter Japanese defensive tactics. They were considered one of the most important weapons in the Pacific War for breaching stubborn Japanese entrenchments.

In their first combat landing at Roi-Namur (Kwajalein Atoll) in February 1944, Bellmon's unit supported the assault on

these twin islands in the Marshall Islands.

The unit returned to base on Maui, Hawaii, where Bellmon and other tank crews began modifying their tanks to enhance survival and effectiveness, showcasing their ingenuity and dedication to protecting the infantry.

Marines adapted existing equipment to demonstrate that unconventional leadership and rapid adaptation could build an elite force in significant engagements of the Pacific War.

With each return to Maui, new features were added until the modifications were deemed complete. These included water tanks to supply the infantry, wooden planking on the sides to prevent magnetic mines, radios welded to the back so the infantry could communicate with the tanks without opening hatches, protection for all hatches, and protection against mines.

These modifications clearly exemplify the Marines' concept of adapting and improvising to defeat a resourceful enemy.

In June of 1944, during the invasion of Saipan, Bellmon's leadership and technical skill with heavy equipment were duly noted by his commanders. He was awarded the Legion of Merit for his tank platoon's frequent success in attacking fortified positions and traversing minefields.

In July, Bellmon's platoon took part in the landing on Tinian, where his unit fought for all but one day of the campaign. Once again, they destroyed many enemy installations while under heavy fire.

In February 1945, Bellmon's final combat landing at Iwo Jima was the most harrowing, as his tank was immobilized by a land mine immediately after landing.

The island, just 8 square miles in size, was key to the Pacific campaign. Its three airfields could support heavy bombers within a close 750-mile strike range of mainland Japan, making Bellmon's actions essential to the broader war effort.

Bellmon was quoted in an interview with Jim Stafford with "The Daily Oklahoman" in 1995 on the 50th anniversary of the invasion, as remembering his tank being stranded because of Japanese fire later in the battle.

"It disabled the tracks, Bellmon said. "It was impossible to get out and fix it with all the machine gun fire, so we just sat there."

"When we would spot a machine gun nest, we'd take it out, and of course, that drew artillery fire," Bellmon said his tank took numerous hits. "They (the Japanese) were stupid," he said. "They were using high-explosive artillery that exploded on impact. We would just get sparks."

Despite the tank being a prime target for artillery, he remained inside to direct his platoon's fire and movements by radio. Over the many days of the long battle, he had two more tanks destroyed beneath him, but continued the attack in new vehicles. Bellmon was known for his aggressive leadership. This courageous effort earned him the Silver Star for his gallantry.

He remembered taking over command of the five tanks of another platoon leader who was killed for several days.

At age 24, Iwo Jima was his most significant and last battle of the war. Approximately 70,000 Marines and Sailors participated; over 6,800 were killed, and nearly 20,000 were wounded. About 22,000 Japanese were killed or captured.

Iwo Jima lasted for 36 days of continuous combat. While military planners initially estimated the island would be secured in just three to four days, Japanese defensive strategies extended the conflict into a grueling five-week campaign.

His unit returned to Maui to train troops for the planned invasion of Japan. The use of the two atomic bombs ended the war.

Navy Fleet Adm. Chester Nimitz, commander in chief of the U.S. Pacific Fleet, said of the



Republican Governor Henry Bellmon in his first term in 1963.



Battle of Iwo Jima, "If there had been any question whether there should be a Marine Corps after this war, the Battle of Iwo Jima will assure that there will always be a Marine Corps."

Bellmon's political achievements, including his principled approach and impact on Oklahoma's Republican party, exemplify how his military leadership translated into public service. After his distinguished service in Oklahoma and Washington, D.C., he taught government and political science at Oklahoma City University, Central State University, Oklahoma State University, and the University of Oklahoma, shaping future generations.

He retired to the family farm and then retired from his wheat and cattle operations in his late 70s. He died at the age of 88 in 2009 following a long struggle with Parkinson's disease.

● by Darl Devault, contributing editor

Right: 1st Lt. Henry "Hank" Bellmon, Co. C, 4th Tank Bn, poses on the back deck of his M4A3 medium tank "Calcutta" during the fighting on Iwo Jima, 1945.



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Cedar Gate Hosts MOH Foundation Fundraiser

Three Medal of Honor recipients were recently part of a fundraising luncheon/live auction/ clay shoot event on July 25 at Cedar Gate in Kingfisher benefiting the Congressional Medal of Honor Foundation. Pictured are William Swenson (MOH) on the left, Earl Plumlee (MOH) next to him, Marla Hill, wife of Brian Hill. Next to her is Britt Slabinski (MOH). On the far right is Brian Hill. Brian and Marla are the owners of Cedar Gate.

Three Medals of Honor recipients attended a fundraising luncheon/live auction/clay shoot event at Cedar Gate in Kingfisher benefiting the Congressional Medal of Honor Foundation.

The Medal of Honor Foundation is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization established to support and advance the mission of the Congressional Medal of Honor Society. Its core purpose is to honor and preserve the legacy of Medal of Honor Recipients by inspiring future generations through the timeless values represented by the Medal: Commitment, Integrity, Courage, Sacrifice, Citizenship, and Patriotism.

The Foundation designs programs that share the extraordinary stories of Medal of Honor Recipients, promote values education, and support the needs of the Recipients and their families.

The 3 Medal of Honor recipients who attended were: • Britt Kelly Slabinski, Senior Chief, US Navy, War on Terrorism, Afghanistan • Earl D. Plumlee, Staff Sergeant, US Army, War on Terrorism, Afghanistan • William D. Swenson, Captain, US Army, War on Terrorism, Afghanistan

The event aims to carry on a tradition established by President Abraham Lincoln in 186. In 163 years, over 40 million Americans have served in the Armed Forces, yet only 3,526 have received this distinguishment. The event is geared toward increasing awareness and honoring soldiers in the Oklahoma City area.

In addition to the Congressional Medal of Honor recipients, the Oklahoma group invited local heroes to take part in the lunch time program.

"It's an honor to have these hero's share their stories. It's such an inspiring experience to meet these heroes and understand what they went through so that we have the liberties we have today," said John Ungerecht, a supporter of the group. "We had 28 teams in attendance, and many lunch only patrons. The 3 MOH recipients availed themselves to all, taking pictures and visiting with folks. Great, very humble guys! Everyone had such a great time!"

Chartered by Congress in 1958, the Congressional Medal of Honor Society's membership is comprised of those who wear the Medal of Honor, our nation's highest military award for valor. As individuals who have gone above and beyond the call of duty, the Medal of Honor Recipients are committed to serving our country in peace as they did in war by championing the values of courage, sacrifice, integrity, commitment, patriotism, and citizenship.

The nonprofit Society preserves their stories and shares their values through Outreach and Education initiatives and its Medal of Honor Museum.

Ungerecht said that the event has already been deemed a huge success due to the corporate interest and sponsorship.

"Putting on an event like this relies heavily on individual and group participation. It becomes an incredible story when local businesses step in and lend their financial support. We couldn't do what we do without them," he said.

Allen Strider, a U.S. Army Combat Engineer, and organizer of the event, said John Nash, Secretary of Military and Veteran Affairs for Oklahoma, served as the keynote speaker.

"He did a really great job," Strider said.

Strider said the auction included having each Medal of Honor recipient be part of a team for

clay shooting.

"To raise more money, we auctioned off each one of them to shoot on somebody's team," he said. "Whoever paid the most money for one of the recipients got that recipient to shoot on their team with them."

Strider said all proceeds benefit the Medal of Honor Foundation.

"Every bit of it. We don't charge a dime for this. I never have charged for this, and I never will. This is what I do for those guys. They deserve it," he said. "I'm a Veteran too from the Vietnam era. When you talk about the Medal of Honor people, the Silver Star, the Bronze Stars, the Purple Hearts, that rings home with me."

Strider said he wants to make the fundraiser an annual event.

"Absolutely. I want to make it as big as I can get it," he said. "I want to do 120 teams, but we need sponsors, we need some companies to stand up and recognize what we do and be one of our sponsors. I don't care what industry you're in, your support means a lot to us, and we could use it."

Strider said they have three different company sponsor levels.

"We have three different sponsor levels. We have the Medal of Honor sponsor, we have the Silver Star sponsor, and we have the Bronze Star sponsor. And we have signs made up for that," he said. "We always make sure we recognize these people because it's appreciated. They have no idea the impact they have made. It makes a significant impact."

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By Van Mitchell

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Faces of the Fallen - Army PFC Jon Townsend

By Jill Stephenson.

Army PFC Jon Townsend of Claremore was killed September 16, 2012 while actively serving in Afghanistan. He was 19 and left behind a wife and many loving family members and friends. One of those family members was his sister Jennifer, who was six years older than Jon. I interviewed her for this article.

Before Jon started school it was clear he was smart and patriotic. He could recite the pledge of allegiance, sing Amazing Grace and knew his multiplication tables. He was actively involved in 4H where he won numerous awards and was influenced by a band teacher to play almost any instrument he picked up, including the trumpet, drums and guitar.

As a young boy, one of Jon's heroes was the tv character, "Walker, Texas Ranger". He admired his heroism in fighting bad guys and saving good girls. According to Jennifer, he would also walk around in a beat up cowboy hat and kick things like a cowboy would. Jennifer said she would call him Noj just to annoy him and that many people called him Jon Ross.

Army PFC Jon Townsend was 19 when he was killed September 16, 2012.

Jon was actively involved in his church and enjoyed sharing his faith with others. He was a talented musician and tutored other kids in his band class. He also played football during high school and was seen playing with the band while wearing his football uniform. Days after graduating from Sequoyah High School in May of 2011, Jon left for bootcamp.

While overseas, he took to the children and asked his family to send candy and wet wipes for them. He said he wanted them to know he was a good guy. Before Jon left for his deployment he married his sweetheart and made a video to watch in the event of his death. He had also been mentoring several youth from local churches. They would meet in a peaceful spot overlooking Claremore Lake where they shared personal issues with him they didn't feel comfortable talking about in church. After Jon was killed, his family collaborated with his friends to create a memorial in that place to honor him. Jennifer remarked that to this day, it is the place where she feels the closest to him. In December of 2015, a one mile section of highway 88 between Oologah and Jon's church was dedicated as the *PFC Jon Ross Townsend Memorial Highway*. Jennifer drives by this often and says it makes her feel good that people still place memorial items there in his honor. She would like people to know that Jon believed in what he was doing. He was there to share God's word and to help people that couldn't help themselves. He led several of his fellow soldiers to God. They called him, "God's soldier" and "Preacher Boy." After his death, one of the wives of his brothers in arms had a patch made that said "God's Soldier" on it. They wore them under a flap on their uniform in his honor.

I asked Jennifer why she thinks it's important for the public to know about our fallen heroes. She said there are many reasons. They gave the ultimate sacrifice - not just for those they know, but for people they never met, for the possibility and hope for a better life, and to know that what they've done will make a difference.

To keep his memory alive, Jennifer still talks about her brother to her children. She reminisced of the great hugs he gave and said her son now gives her the same kind. Her son was four and oldest daughter was two when Jon died. She has since had another daughter. She has been honest



PFC JON ROSS
TOWNSEND
MEMORIAL HIGHWAY

about what happened to him and shared with them that Jon loved God and his family and friends and he died serving his country. If he was still here he would do it all over again.

Jennifer stated that Jon grew up without a dad and believes this is why he made the switch with a fellow soldier the night he died. Jon said to him, "You need to be able to stay in and get some rest and call your kids. I'll take your turn and you can take mine later." He saw the importance of being a father because he grew up without one. He would pay with his life so children he never knew would still have a father.

PFC Jon Ross Townsend is laid to rest next to his grandfather, who was his father figure, at Lone Chapel Cemetery in Pryor. He is loved and missed every day. ●
story by Jill Stephenson, Gold Star Mother.

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Presidents Remembered

Thomas Jefferson

The 3rd President of the United States

Thomas Jefferson, a spokesman for democracy, was an American Founding Father, the principal author of the Declaration of Independence (1776), and the third President of the United States (1801–1809).

In the thick of party conflict in 1800, Thomas Jefferson wrote in a private letter, “I have sworn upon the altar of God eternal hostility against every form of tyranny over the mind of man.”

This powerful advocate of liberty was born in 1743 in Albemarle County, Virginia, inheriting from his father, a planter and surveyor, some 5,000 acres of land, and from his mother, a Randolph, high social standing. He studied at the College of William and Mary, then read law. In 1772 he married Martha Wayles Skelton, a widow, and took her to live in his partly constructed mountaintop home, Monticello.

Freckled and sandy-haired, rather tall and awkward, Jefferson was eloquent as a correspondent, but he was no public speaker. In the Virginia House of Burgesses and the Continental Congress, he contributed his pen rather than his voice to the patriot cause. As the “silent member” of the Congress, Jefferson, at 33, drafted the Declaration of Independence. In years following he labored to make its words a reality in Virginia. Most notably, he wrote a bill establishing religious freedom, enacted in 1786.

Jefferson succeeded Benjamin Franklin as minister to France in 1785. His sympathy for the French Revolution led him into conflict with Alexander Hamilton when Jefferson was Secretary of State in President Washington’s Cabinet. He resigned in 1793.

Sharp political conflict developed, and two separate parties, the Federalists and the Democratic-Republicans, began to form. Jefferson gradually assumed leadership of the Republicans, who sympathized with the revolutionary cause in France. Attacking Federalist policies, he opposed a strong centralized Government and championed the rights of states.

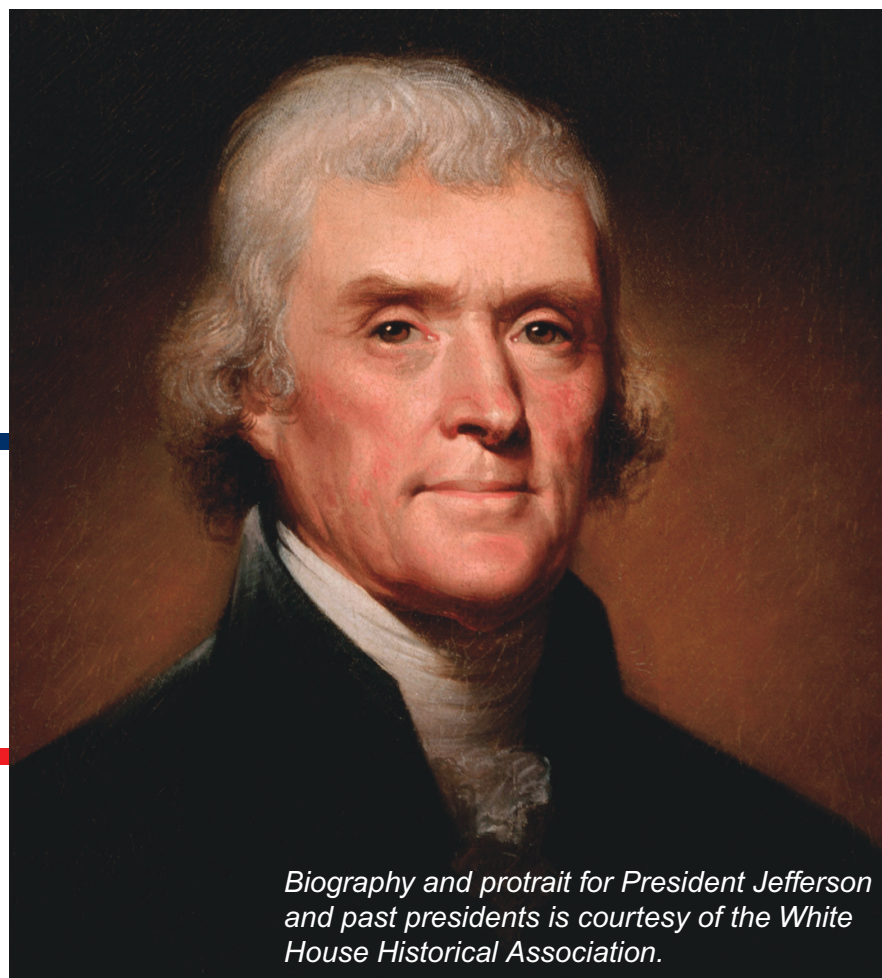
As a reluctant candidate for President in 1796, Jefferson came within three votes of election. Through a flaw in the Constitution, he became Vice President, although an opponent of President Adams. In 1800 the defect caused a more serious problem. Republican electors, attempting to name both a President and a Vice President from their own party, cast a tie vote between Jefferson and Aaron Burr. The House of Representatives settled the tie. Hamilton, disliking both Jefferson and Burr, nevertheless urged Jefferson’s election.

When Jefferson assumed the Presidency, the crisis in France had passed. He slashed Army and Navy expenditures, cut the budget, eliminated the tax on whiskey so unpopular in the West, yet reduced the national debt by a third. He also sent a naval squadron to fight the Barbary pirates, who were harassing American commerce in the Mediterranean. Further, although the Constitution made no provision for the acquisition of new land, Jefferson suppressed his qualms over constitutionality when he had the opportunity to acquire the Louisiana Territory from Napoleon in 1803.

During Jefferson’s second term, he was increasingly preoccupied with keeping the Nation from involvement in the Napoleonic wars, though both England and France interfered with the neutral rights of American merchantmen. Jefferson’s attempted solution, an embargo upon American shipping, worked badly and was unpopular.

Jefferson retired to Monticello to ponder such projects as his grand designs for the University of Virginia. A French nobleman observed that he had placed his house and his mind “on an elevated situation, from which he might contemplate the universe.”

He died on July 4, 1826. ●



Biography and portrait for President Jefferson and past presidents is courtesy of the White House Historical Association.

Martha Wayles Skelton Jefferson

Wife 3rd President of the United States, Thomas Jefferson

A widow of her first marriage, Martha Wayles Skelton Jefferson was the wife of the third President of the United States, Thomas Jefferson. Dying of ill health during the Revolutionary War, she did not live to see her husband become President.

When Thomas Jefferson came courting, Martha Wayles Skelton at 22 was already a widow, an heiress, and a mother whose firstborn son would die in early childhood. Family tradition says that she was accomplished and beautiful—with slender figure, hazel eyes, and auburn hair—and wooed by many. Perhaps a mutual love of music cemented the romance; Jefferson played the violin, and one of the furnishings he ordered for the home he was building at Monticello was a “forte-piano” for his bride.

They were married on New Year’s Day, 1772, at the bride’s plantation home “The Forest,” near Williamsburg. When they finally reached Monticello in a late January snowstorm to find no fire, no food, and the servants asleep, they toasted their new home with a leftover half-bottle of wine and “song and merriment and laughter.” That night, on their own mountaintop, the love of Thomas Jefferson and his bride seemed strong enough to endure any adversity.

The birth of their daughter Martha in September increased their happiness. Within ten years the family gained five more children. Of them all, only two lived to grow up: Martha, called Patsy, and Mary, called Maria or Polly.

The physical strain of frequent pregnancies weakened Martha Jefferson so gravely that her husband curtailed his political activities to stay near her. He served in Virginia’s House of Delegates and as governor, but he refused an appointment by the Continental Congress as a commissioner to France. Just after New Year’s Day, 1781, a British invasion forced Martha to flee the capital in Richmond with a baby girl a few weeks old—who died in April. In June the family barely escaped an enemy raid on Monticello. She bore another daughter the following May, and never regained a fair measure of strength. Jefferson wrote on May 20 that her condition was dangerous. After months of tending her devotedly, he noted in his account book for September 6, “My dear wife died this day at 11:45 A.M.”

Apparently he never brought himself to record their life together; in a memoir he referred to ten years “in unchequered happiness.” Half a century later his daughter Martha remembered his sorrow: “the violence of his emotion...to this day I not describe to myself.” For three weeks he had shut himself in his room, pacing back and forth until exhausted. Slowly that first anguish spent itself. In November he agreed to serve as commissioner to France, eventually taking “Patsy” with him in 1784 and send for “Polly” later.

When Jefferson became President in 1801, he had been a widower for 19 years. He had become as capable of handling social affairs as political matters. Occasionally he called on Dolley Madison for assistance. And it was Patsy—now Mrs. Thomas Mann Randolph, Jr.—who appeared as the lady of the President’s House in the winter of 1802-1803, when she spent seven weeks there. She was there again in 1805-1806, and gave birth to a son named for James Madison, the first child born in the White House. It was Martha Randolph with her family who shared Jefferson’s retirement at Monticello until he died there in 1826. ●

The biographies of the First Ladies on WhiteHouse.gov are from “The First Ladies of the United States of America,” by Allida Black. Copyright 2009 by the White House Historical Association.



Chaplain's Corner

Your Sabbath

Greetings, I'm SFC (Ret) George Shafer. I served as Chaplain at the American Legion in Guthrie, Oklahoma while earning my M.Div. I'm now the Digital Media Pastor for Generations Church in Guthrie. It's a great Christian community.

As Veterans, we share an ethos that guide our decisions, ethics and moral compass. Concepts like timeliness, integrity, courage and selfless service. We learned the value of hard work and its positive impact on our organization, mission and fellow service members. But we often struggle with balancing these proactive values with the concept rest. When we take time to stop and rest, it can be followed by underlying guilt, even shame. We are culturally driven to do the work, to grind it out, no time off, even at the expense of neglecting those we care about. So, how do we avoid these consequences?

There is an amazing alignment between the science of health and wellness and the teachings in scripture concerning the need for rest, it's called Sabbath. The same root word as sabbatical. The Sabbath is a staple of the Judeo-Christian culture, yet we witness daily the results of ignoring its benefits. Exhaustion, worry, anxiety, feeling overwhelmed, quick tempers, damaged relationships, work burnout, addictions and others are symptoms of our overworked and under rested lifestyles.

We were created in God's image and likeness. We were made



Rev. George F. Shafer, SFC (Ret.), M.Div., B.S., Chaplain (TAL Post 58)

to rest. We were made to stop. We were made to meditate on God. Just reading those three sentences may make you cringe or laugh on the inside. "George, you don't know my schedule." "You don't understand the pressure I'm under." "I need to feed my family." All valid points, but all too often these people arrive at jobs, even to church, burnt

out, full of contempt and bitterness, going through the motions. Now more than ever we need to seek peace, joy, and contentment. These are three fantastic byproducts of the Sabbath, if we'll only embrace and practice it!

Yes, adhering to the Sabbath is difficult. Attempting your first 24-hour Sabbath will likely be a rehearsal of all that you forgot to do! But it is through this challenge that the fruits of the Sabbath are revealed. Honoring the Sabbath requires you to schedule around it. Early Hebrews understood the Sabbath to begin once the third star is seen in the night sky on Friday evening and concludes when the third star is observed on Saturday evening. It shows us that the Sabbath is not ritualistic as it varies from week to week when the stars are visible to us.

For five years I have intentionally practiced my Sabbath. It has helped me find a balance that has created a closer, more intimate relationship with God and my family. I am healthier, clear-headed, more patient, and more flexible with change. The Sabbath has given me peace, joy, and contentment, and has been an integral part of refreshing my mind, body, soul, and emotions.

Communication has been key to sustaining my Sabbath. In-depth and consistent communication with my wife, my family, my job, and my friends has helped create the space necessary to observe the Sabbath. It also gave unspoken permission for the people around me to observe the Sabbath in their own time.

Take time to focus on your own Sabbath, find rest for your soul. Christ shares this promise: Matt 11:28, Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ●

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The Living Salute Fort Reno's Deceased Veterans

Two distinctly different memorial services at Fort Reno in November and December honored two groups of veterans buried at the Post Cemetery to ensure their service was not forgotten. Debra Kauffman, President of Historic Fort Reno, Inc., hosted both events. Fort Reno sits four miles from El Reno on Route 66.

German Memorial Day

On November 23 at the Visitors Center, attendees stated the importance of remembering the dead from wars- not just Prisoners of War (POWs) at Fort Reno - but from any country and from any war. Captain Rolf Niemezewski, Commander of the German Air Force unit at Fort Sill's Air Defense Training Center, said, "I really appreciate the honor to attend the German Memorial Day inside the United States to think about all the fallen soldiers, no matter which country, and also think about the children and women that died and were wounded."

The service moved to the Post Cemetery, where a stone wall separates the majority of the buried (veterans, civilians, American Indians) from POWs buried there. Moving slowly through the German and Italian POW Cemetery to the song, "Amazing Grace," the German national flag, Deutschlandfahne, was carried by one of three uniformed German Air Force Honor Guard. Ten more German Air Force servicemen stood at attention in the cemetery. Then, Hildegard Effinger and Jutta Tankersley of Tulsa and two German Air Force members placed five wreaths next to tombstones as thirty people watched.

Finally, Susan Calvert led the group singing "The Good Comrade" in German, a song written by German poet Ludwig Uhland in 1809.

Fort Reno's POW History

Fort Reno's POW Camp was constructed in 1943 and German prisoners began arriving July 4, 1943, according to a Fort Reno Visitors Center handout, "World War II German Prisoner of War Camp." Up to 1,335 POWs were held at one time. Seventy World War II POWs are interred at the Fort Reno Cemetery. "There are 62 Germans and 8 Italians, the majority of those interred at Fort Reno were held at POW Camps in Oklahoma and Texas."

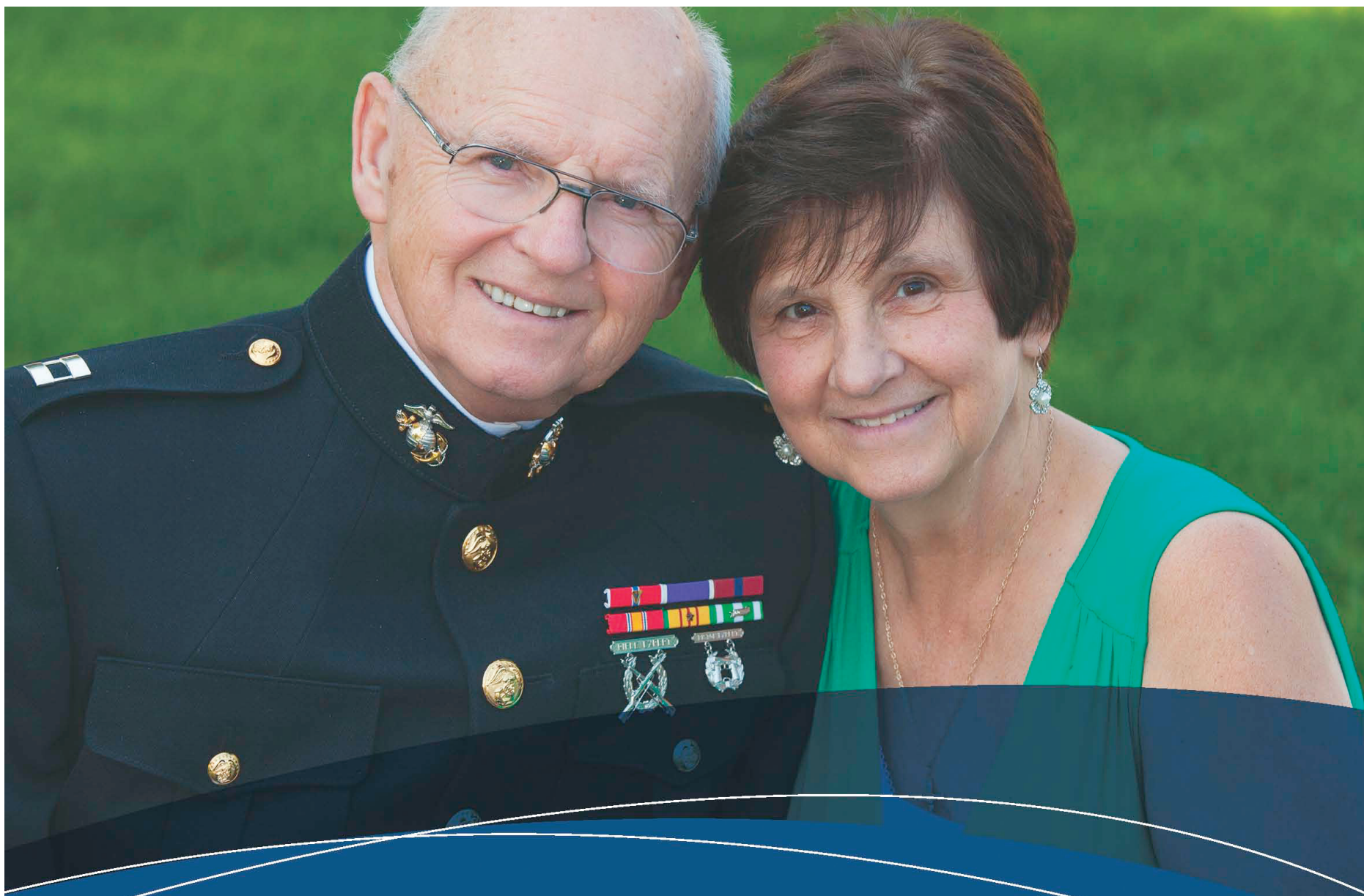
CONTINUED ON PAGE 24



Karl Polte, Private First Class, a German POW, died on April 20, 1945 and is buried at Fort Reno's Cemetery. Germany surrendered 18 days later.



Hildegard Effinger (left) and Jutta Tankersley (right) are escorted by German Air Force Captain Rolf Niemezewski to place wreaths in the POW cemetery.



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Fort Reno

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 22

Wreaths Across America

A mix of long rifles, muskets and pistols fired together at the Post Cemetery on December 20 - not in anger, but in honor of veterans - during the nationally held Wreaths Across America Ceremony. It was sponsored by the National Society Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR).

Once 60 visitors assembled at the Post Cemetery, Leslie Dietrich, Regent of the Fort Reno Chapter of DAR, welcomed everybody and asked for the Colors to be posted. Allegiance was given to our flag, followed by a prayer of remembrance for deceased veterans.

Dietrich said the group lays wreaths “to remember, honor and teach about those who served in the military and protected our freedoms...and teach the next generation the value of freedom.” Their purpose is “not to decorate graves...” but express a “symbol of honor for their (veterans) sacrifice.” The National DAR has given service to living and deceased veterans since 1890.

Attendees then picked up the green wreaths



that the DAR brought and put them on veteran’s headstones while reciting their name as a way to publicly show they are not forgotten. After Dan Wilson of Wakita laid a wreath, he said, “I love to see the respect given to those who have gone before us.” German and Italian soldiers buried at the P.O.W. Cemetery did not receive wreaths.

Members of the Sons of the American Revolution and The Guthrie Gunfighters, dressed in historical period clothing, formed a line and fired three volleys. Then, Chad Kautz played a mournful Taps. The Guthrie Gunfighters’ Trail Boss, Kent Smith, said, “We come out to support the museum in a unique way to honor our veterans.”

In 2022, the Worcester Wreath Company of Harrington, Maine, placed wreaths on 2.7 million veteran’s headstones at 3,702 locations in all 50 states and abroad with

the help of two million volunteers and organizations providing support.

After both events, Kaufman opened the museum for individual tours and a reception, offering engaging conversation and a variety of food and beverages. She summarized the events by saying, “We are fortunate to have a cemetery that has a long period of history tied to it. With the German-Italian Memorial Service and the DAR’s Wreaths Across America service, they provide opportunities to honor servicemen buried there.”

“To be killed in war is not the worst that can happen. To be lost is not the worst that can happen.....to be forgotten is the worst.”
Piere Claeysens (1909-2003). ●

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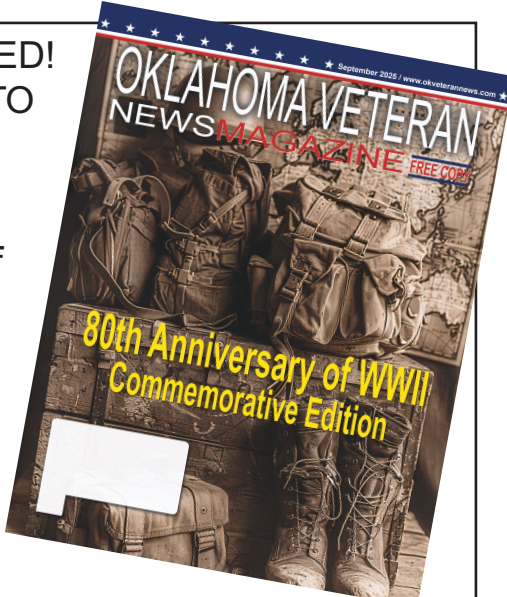
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Coffee Bunker's mission is "to empower veterans and their families as they move forward." They support veterans and their families transition to civilian life through personal and professional development.

Attendees sampled - and re-sampled - a wide variety of appetizers prepared by 10 local chefs. Each guest dropped their attendance ticket in one chef's bowl to vote for the "People's Choice Award."

Chefs had personal reasons for participating. John Badgwell, an Army veteran in Tulsa, said, "I like to cook for the Coffee Bunker once a month because I want to give back to veterans." He and another chef offered raspberry lemon cakes with homemade raspberry topping and cherry chocolate brownies with homemade cherry glaze.

Joaquinn Juarez cooks for the Food Bank of Eastern Oklahoma. "My mom is a ten-year Navy vet and she went to the Coffee Bunker often. Someone at the Food Bank suggested I show up and compete." His oh-so-good meatballs were rewarded with the People's Choice Award, a white chef's jacket. Dr. Michael Horton, Coffee Bunker's Executive Director, said, "It's a very prestigious jacket. They want that jacket."

After the auction and People's Choice winners were announced, Scott Blackburn and Dr. Robby Hedrick were inducted into Oklahoma's Military Hall of Honor for their work at Coffee Bunker and presented medallions.

From the stage, Jim Lyall, President of the Board of Directors, remarked, "I've worked alongside our two inductees tonight for several years, and both of them wear the motto, 'The spirit of a warrior in the Heart of a Patriot.'"

Blackburn served as Operations Manager from 2011 to 2019. Lyall noted, "Scott credits the veterans, the volunteers he had the honor of serving with, and the community partners for the success of the Coffee Bunker and the lives that are changed within its walls." Blackburn is now a clinical therapist at Rightway Medical in Bartlesville.

Lyall then recognized Dr. Robbie Hedrick, a former Director of Transition Services. Among Hedrick's accomplishments, Lyall added, "he led strategic initiatives and connected veterans and their families to critical resources in education, employment, and

Left: Joaquinn Juarez won the People's Choice Award for best appetizer, which was a chef's jacket. He served tasty meatballs. He cooks for the Food Bank of Eastern Oklahoma.





Scott Blackburn (left), was inducted into the Coffee Bunker's Oklahoma Military Hall of Honor. Mary Ligon, the Coffee Bunker founder, is center and Jim Lyall, Chairman of the Board, is on the right.

Left: *Dr. Robby Hedrick (right) is inducted into the Coffee Bunker's Oklahoma Military Hall of Honor by Jim Lyall (left), Chairman of the Board.*

entrepreneurship. His leadership helped forge partnerships with (other service) organizations..." Hedrick now works as a Military Account Executive at Grand Canyon University.

The Honorable Rebecca Nightingale received the first-ever Lieutenant Colonel Bobby Armour Service to Veterans Award. As a Tulsa District Judge, she supervises the Alternative Courts program, including Veterans Treatment Court and Reentry Court.

Lyall explained, "Working with veterans and those recently released from prison is Judge Nightingale's passion...Adjudication of Cases in Veterans Treatment Court necessitates the unique ability to blend appropriate justice and appropriate compassion."

Mary Ligon, Coffee Bunker's founder, concluded with a moving, deeply personal account of the organization's beginnings. Daniel, her Marine son who experienced intense combat in Iraq, returned home with severe PTSD and died by suicide in 2007.

Ligon recalled him saying, "Mom, there's no one to talk to. And there's no USO or anything. And you know, civilians, they can be really nice, but they just can't relate." She "began to have this concept of a place...where they (veterans) could put up their boots...and just talk and connect." She provided examples of the veteran center's importance and relevance.

Coffee Bunker receives no local, state, or federal funding and relies entirely on grants, donations, and fundraising. Dr. Horton explained, "The funds from... Bunker Bites...will be dispersed...to all the programs we do for veterans, to include our food pantry, helping them with job searches...with education searches, and sometimes, emergency funding." The event raised \$70,000 - an impressive 30% increase over 2024's \$50,000 total. The lead sponsor among 19 listed in the program was Helmerich Payne, Inc.

Afterwards, Horton mentioned that "people left in good spirits with a willingness to donate more and it was a great exercise of teamwork."

A community that knows Coffee Bunker makes a difference ensured the doors were kept open to help veterans and their families. ●
by Richard Stephens, Jr., Lt Col, USAF, Ret. See Rich Travel Niche

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Mental health care: 888-397-8387, ext. 4

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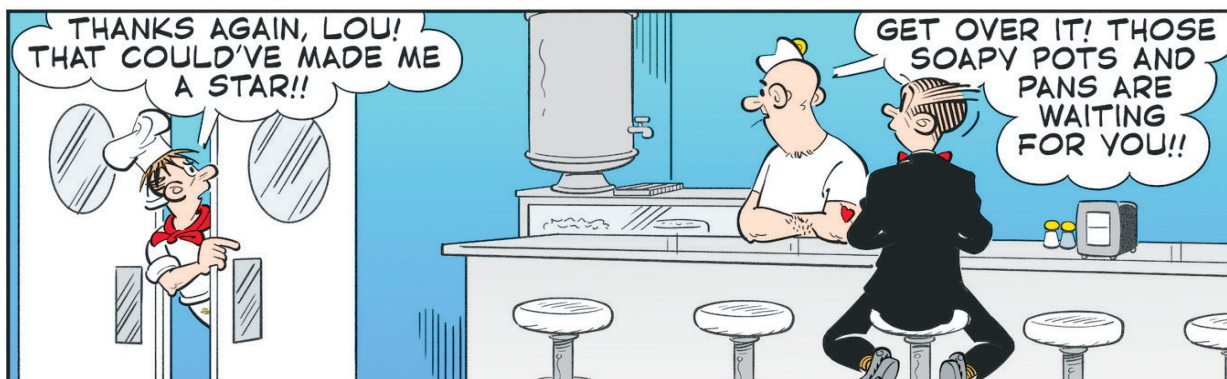
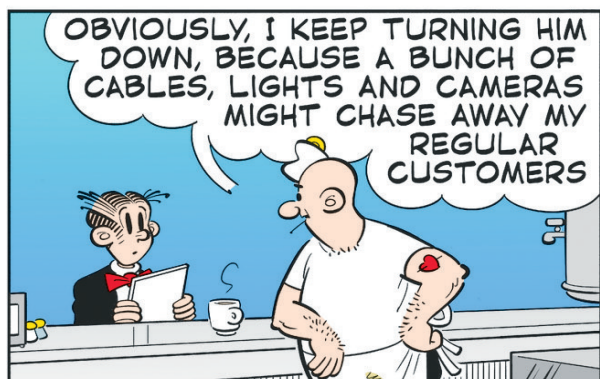
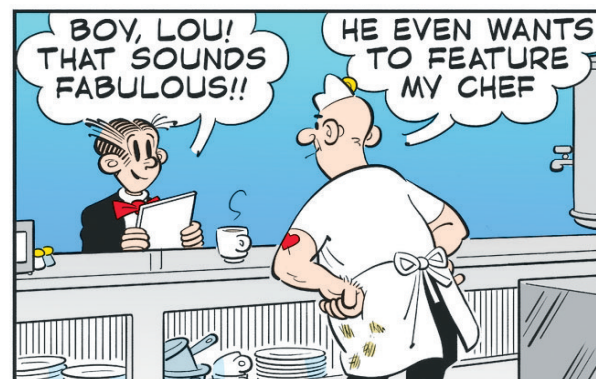
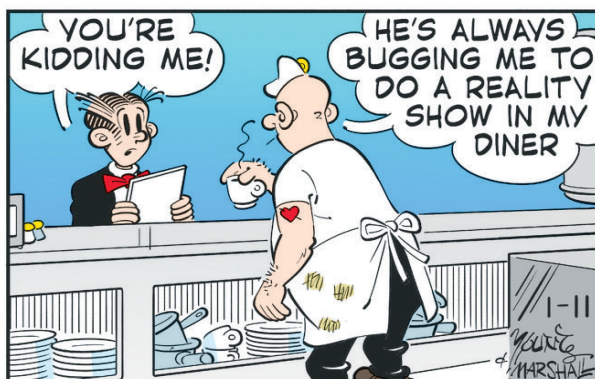
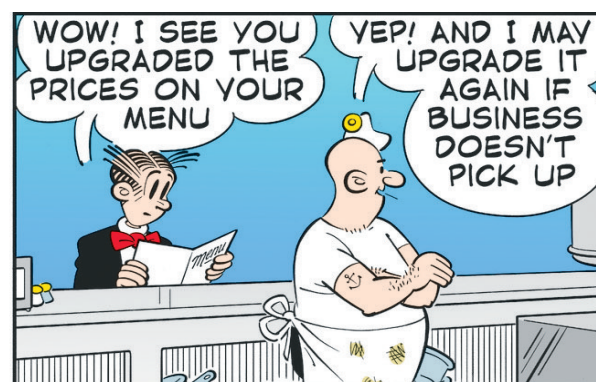
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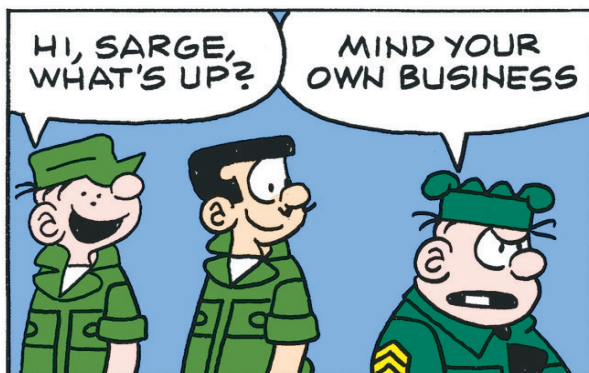
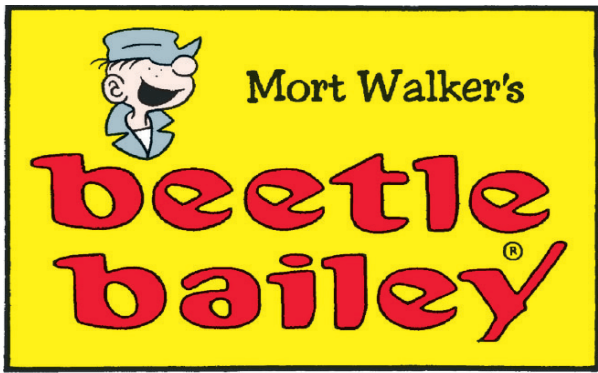
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