

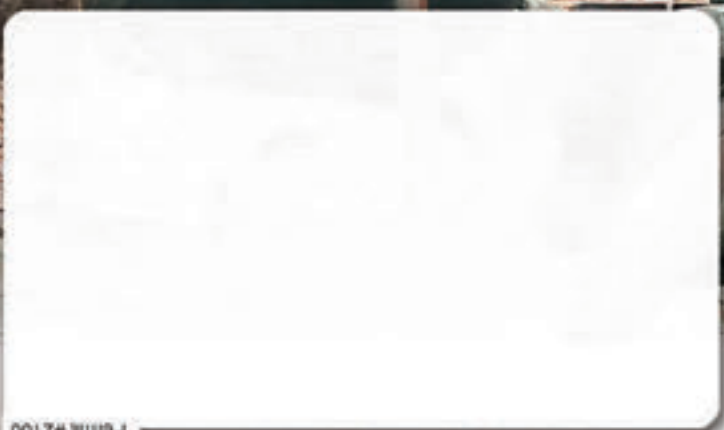


OKLAHOMA VETERAN NEWS MAGAZINE **FREE COPY**



Lives Saved, Battles Won Oklahoma Native American Code Talkers

photo by Roger Tehauno Jr.



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Oklahoma Veteran News Receives Governor's Commendation and Senate Citation of Recognition

Read more on page 6



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STAFF

Editor/Co-Publisher

Steven R. Eldridge

news@okveterannews.com

Co-Publisher, Sales, Marketing,

Steven Sibley, E7 RET/DV

steven.t.sibley.vet@gmail.com

918-404-0807

STAFF WRITERS

- Bobby Anderson • Darl Devault
- Richard Stephens, Jr. • James Coburn • Van Mitchel • Marise Boehs • Vickie Jenkins

• Jill Stephenson

news@okveterannews.com

ADVERTISING/BUSINESS

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

Business Services

Sales - Steve Sibley

advertising@okveterannews.com

advertising@okveterannews.com 405-631-5100

Editorial Information

Send news, opinion and event items to Editor, P.O. Box 239 Mustang, Ok 73064 or email

news@okveterannews.com 405-631-5100

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Of the 38 federally recognized American Indian tribes headquartered in Oklahoma, five Nations: Comanche (17 men), Pawnee (9 men), Choctaw (4 men), Muscogee/Creek-Seminole (3 men), and the Kiowa Tribe (3 men) provided a total of 36 Code Talkers, sometimes called "Telephone Talkers." *Read more on page 4*





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On the Cover: A Memorial Day Tribute

Lives Saved, Battles Won - WWII Oklahoma N

A Select Group of Men

Of the 38 federally recognized American Indian tribes headquartered in Oklahoma, five Nations: Comanche (17 men), Pawnee (9 men), Choctaw (4 men), Muscogee/Creek-Seminole (3 men), and the Kiowa Tribe (3 men) provided a total of 36 Code Talkers, sometimes called "Telephone Talkers."

Real-Time Communications

Dr. John Curatola, Senior Historian at the National WWII Museum, explained that communications operated at a tactical level and the soldiers were usually dispersed throughout platoons and companies. He said code talkers operated the radios, speaking their tribe's language or in codes.

"And so that way they would be communicating with their adjacent units or maybe to the battalion in the back, sharing information." Curatola noted that such messages included intelligence, ammunition levels, supply status and enemy positions—anything useful during combat.

Comanche Deployed to Europe

Comanche soldiers were assigned to the Fourth Infantry Division's Fourth Signal Company at Fort Benning, Georgia, receiving phone, radio, Morse code, and semaphore training. Dr. William Meadows, Professor of Native American studies at Missouri State University, an author of seven books about American Indians, described the Comanche's training and service in "The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture."

"In August 1941 they were placed under Lt. Hugh F. Foster to develop an unbreakable Comanche-language code. Foster provided approximately 250 specialized military terms for which the Comanches developed coded equivalents." Training was complete by October 30, 1941.

"Thirteen Comanche Code Talkers landed at Utah Beach during the Normandy invasion in France. Maintaining wire telephone lines and sending secure

messages via field telephone and radio, they served in France, Luxembourg, Belgium, and Germany. Their service included important battles at Cherbourg, St. Lo, Paris, the Siegfried Line, the Huertgen Forest, and Bastogne. Although several were wounded in action, none were killed. The Comanche code was never broken."

A Life of Service Beyond War

Meadows profiled Corporal Forrest Vernon Kassanavoid, a Comanche Code Talker born March 30, 1921, and died at the age of 75. Wounded by shrapnel in WWII, he received the Purple Heart. He became the first American Indian to graduate from Cameron Junior College under the G.I. Bill in 1947 and later attended Oklahoma A&M College. After the war, Kassanavoid enlisted for six years in the Oklahoma Army National Guard as a staff sergeant. He also worked as a private military supplier for the U.S. government for four years and with the U.S. Postal Service for 28 years. Later, he returned to Indianola, serving as a committeeman for the Comanche Business Committee.



Edmond Harjo was a Seminole Code Talker in WWII. Photo by Dr. Michael Meadows

Courage Under Fire

The Choctaw Code Talker Association identified four Choctaws who served in the European Theater: Schlicht Billy, Forreston Baker, Davis Pickens and Andrew Perry. Pickens and Perry were killed in action.

Army 2Lt. Schlicht Billy received the Silver Star and the Purple Heart while serving with the 45th Infantry Division. His friend, Davis Pickens, was the Choctaw on the other radio and was killed in action. Billy led an attack on the Siegfried Line in Germany on March 17, 1945, becoming the first soldier to reach a German-held pillbox and toss in a grenade. During the battle, Billy was severely wounded. His actions earned him the Silver Star.

Kiowa Tribe Honored

At the 2025 Oklahoma Military Hall of Fame banquet, three Kiowa Code Talkers were inducted posthumously: Private First Class (PFC) Leonard "Red Wolf" Cozad, Sr., PFC James Paddlety, Jr., and Private John Tsatoke. They were assigned to the 689th Field Artillery, XX Corps, in the European Theater.

Chairman Lawrence SpottedBird, a Vietnam era Navy veteran, accepted on behalf of the tribe, stating, "All these Kiowa legends are deceased, but their legacy as Kiowa warriors, the legacy of all of our Kiowa warriors, lives on today." Then, Kiowa singers drummed and sang a victory song as more than 50 Kiowa Tribal members and all banquet guests stood in respect.

Different Reasons to Enlist

Meadows identified several factors that motivated American Indians to enlist: traditional warrior culture, military preconditioning through boarding schools, unemployment, and out of tribal and national patriotism.



Native American Code Talkers

The Warrior Spirit honors those who fought, died: Outside the Comanche Nation Tribal Complex nine miles north of Lawton. 14 warriors who lost their lives, went missing in action or were taken prisoner are honored by a circular array of stone monuments. photo by Roger Tehauno Jr.



Charles Chibitty landed on Utah Beach during the D-Day invasion, June 1944, and started communicating right away about the battle. Photo given by Dr. William Meadows.

Using A Unique Weapon

Many American Indians recognized the irony of being forced into boarding schools that attempted to erase their language and culture, only for those same languages to become invaluable in wartime.

Meadows wrote, "As one code talker told me, he had something that other soldiers did not - his language - and his language was his weapon."

A Record of Distinction

In an article, "American Indian Veterans Have Highest Record of Military Service,"

Alan Ramirez stated American Indians and Alaska Natives serve in the Armed Forces at five times the national average and have served with distinction in every major conflict for over 200 years.

"American Indians enlisted in overwhelming numbers after the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941...Forty-four thousand of a total American Indian population of 350,000 saw active duty, including nearly 800 women. For this service they earned at least 71 Air Medals, 34 Distinguished Flying Crosses, 51 Silver Stars, 47 Bronze Stars and five Medals of Honor." Long-Overdue Honors

American Indians from at least 34 American Indian nations were given Congressional Gold Medals in recognition for WW I and WWII Code Talker service: the Navajo in 2001 and 33 others after the Code Talkers Recognition Act of 2008.

The French government and the State of Oklahoma bestowed the Chevalier de L'Order National du Merite (Knight of the Order of National

Merit) on November 3, 1989 posthumously to the World War I Choctaw and to the three then-surviving World War II Comanche Code Talkers (Chibitty, Kassanavoid, and Roderick Red Elk) at the Oklahoma Capitol.

The Oklahoma Military Hall of Fame inducted the Seminole, Choctaw and Pawnee Nations and the Kiowa Tribe over time.

Comanche Code Talker Charles Chibitty reflected to Meadows, "After all of it was over with, they finally honored us at the state capitol. But to know that I at least done something for the country, what little I did...If what little we did saved some of those lives, then I'm proud I was part of it you know."

Oklahoma's Native Americans are immensely proud of their veteran's service. For more information, visit tribal websites or consult library resources. ● *Story by Lt. Col. Richard Stephens, Jr., USAFR, Ret. website: Rich Travel Niche*



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Oklahoma Veteran News Magazine Receives Highest Recognition

For the statewide free Oklahoma Veterans News Magazine to receive a Senate Citation of Recognition after just one year in print serves as powerful validation of its role in bridging the gap between state resources and the Veterans it serves.

Such recognition highlights the magazine's value as a statewide communication tool that unifies a community of over 300,000 Veterans.

Co-publishers Steve Eldridge and Veteran Steve Sibley worked together on its creation for more than a year leading up to the publication's first issue in May 2025.

This official validation of impact from State Senator Brenda Stanley (R-Midwest City), who chairs the Senate Veterans and Military Affairs Committee, designates the publication as a trusted source of information for the state's military community.

This legislative commendation reinforces the magazine's role as a "vital part of the state's identity," officially acknowledging its mission to pay tribute to the service and sacrifice of Oklahoma Veterans and their families.

All of this is because the magazine is attempting to help many Veterans who are unaware of available benefits, such as sales tax exemptions. A recognized statewide magazine acts as a critical partner in disseminating this essential information and updates on benefits, services, and new laws, such as the PACT Act and state-specific tax exemptions.

It also serves as a platform to raise awareness of Veteran-owned businesses and encourage "patriotic Oklahomans" to support them.

The platform also promotes storytelling and community engagement. It helps preserve the patriotic legacy by sharing stories of Veterans' achievements. It chronicles their sacrifice, fostering a sense of belonging and "collective pride" across the state.

Its outreach for isolated Veterans continues to expand with over 600 distribution points-including VFWs, American Legion posts, and VA clinics. This magazine reaches Veterans who may not have easy access to digital information, partnering with the Oklahoma Department of Veterans Affairs (ODVA) to feature leadership and highlight state-run programs and ceremonies.

The content of the document follows:

THE STATE OF OKLAHOMA Citation of Recognition

*EXPRESSING SUPPORT FOR THE OKLAHOMA VETERAN NEWS MAGAZINE;
COMMENDING ITS LEADERSHIP; AND DIRECTING DISTRIBUTION.*

WHEREAS, Senator Brenda Stanley, Chair of the Senate Veterans and Military Affairs Committee, proudly supports the mission of the Oklahoma Veteran News Magazine, the first statewide monthly free publication dedicated to serving Oklahoma's veterans, active-duty service members, and their families; and

WHEREAS, the magazine marks one year in print, reflecting its continued commitment to informing, connecting and honoring those who have taken the oath to defend the United States; and

WHEREAS, Oklahoma is home to major installations, including Altus Air Force Base, Fort Sill, McAlester Army Ammunition Plant, Tinker Air Force Base, and Vance Air Force Base, which play a vital role in national defense and serve as key economic drivers; and

WHEREAS, the Oklahoma Veteran News Magazine strengthens the military community by sharing important information, connecting veterans to resources, and promoting awareness, respect, and appreciation for their service; and

WHEREAS, the Oklahoma Senate recognizes the importance of ensuring veterans and their families have access to timely, accurate information and honors the service and sacrifice of those who have defended our freedoms;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE OF THE 60TH OKLAHOMA



LEGISLATURE:

THAT the Oklahoma Senate expresses its support for the Oklahoma Veteran News Magazine and its mission to serve Oklahoma's military and veteran community, and

THAT co-publishers Steve Eldridge and Veteran Steve Sibley are commended for exemplifying the spirit of "The Oklahoma Standard" through their dedication to veterans' affairs and community service; and

THAT a copy of this resolution be distributed to Steve Eldridge and Steve Sibley.

Signed April 22, 2026: Senator Brenda Stanley
Senate District 42 ●

story by Darl Devault, contributing editor

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FROM THE PUBLISHERS

Your Support Matters

This issue represents our 1st anniversary edition! Twelve issues and still growing and changing to publish the best magazine each month. We can't provide these things without our readers like you and sponsors.

The continued success of Oklahoma Veteran News Magazine depends on a strong, connected community—and that includes you. We encourage every reader to take a moment to support the businesses and organizations featured in this publication. These sponsors make it possible to share important stories, resources, and updates that serve veterans across our state. By choosing to do business with them, you're directly helping sustain a platform dedicated to honoring and supporting those who have served.

If you find value in this magazine, consider spreading the word. Recommend Oklahoma Veteran News Magazine to local businesses, organizations, and community leaders who may benefit from reaching a veteran-focused audience. When more businesses step forward to advertise and partner with us, it strengthens our ability to grow, improve, and expand the content we provide.

This publication is more than just a magazine—it's a voice for Oklahoma's veteran community. It highlights achievements, addresses challenges, and connects individuals to vital



resources. That kind of impact requires ongoing support from both readers and sponsors alike.

Your actions matter. Supporting our sponsors and introducing new ones ensures that this magazine continues to thrive and serve future generations of veterans. Together, we can keep this important resource strong, relevant, and available to all who need it.

As always, We encourage you to give us a call or send us an email and let us know how we are doing and how we can improve. Oklahoma Veteran News is published for you.

Sincerely,
Steve Eldridge and Steve Sibley



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Group photo of the American Veteran Motorcycle Club members.

More Than Just a Motorcycle Club

Jack Foster, a/k/a, Wingnut, State Enforcer for the OK American Veteran Motorcycle Club.

In mid March a friend was flying into Tulsa to visit her parents. I offered to pick her up from the airport. While she was waiting to change planes in Denver, she sent me a picture of a flag draped casket being loaded or unloaded to (or from) the plane she was about to board. She did some quick research and discovered one of the most recent soldiers killed in action in support of Operation Epic Fury was stationed at Fort Carson, Colorado. This must have been him.

We were both moved by this because my son was killed in action in 2009 and was received at our home airport. My heart ached for the sacrifice this young man and his family just made. I arrived at the airport early and made the turn to wait in the cell phone lot. As I rounded the corner I saw the parking lot was half filled with motorcycles lined up and facing the exit. My heart skipped a beat. There is only one reason for motorcycles to be lined up in an airport cell phone lot; to escort the body of a veteran or a fallen service member.

I knew this from my own experience and wondered if the casket my friend saw was the same one these motorcycles would be escorting. I parked my car, approached someone and asked why they were there. I happened to choose one of the ride captains and State Chapter Enforcer, Jack Foster, a/k/a, Wingnut, who informed me they were there to escort a fallen soldier, however, it wasn't the young man from Ft. Carson.

It felt serendipitous that my friend and I were witness to such escorts on the same day. I shared with Jack that I was the mother of a fallen soldier and appreciated what they were doing. There were about fifty other men and women standing around the small sea of motorcycles. Most were wearing vests with various identifying patches of which motorcycle club they belonged. Motorcycle Clubs or MC's are often given a bad rap and thought to be associations of

societal rabble-rousers. Again from my own experience, I knew this was not true. I honored my son for twelve years with a fund raising event (in my home state) that included a motorcycle ride, silent auction and dinner. At my son's homecoming, wake, funeral and at the annual fundraiser, the presence of motorcycle clubs played a significant role in the legacy of each of these events. I came to know and admire individual members and count many as friends to this day. The people I know as members of an "MC" are some of the most selfless, generous and kind people I have met. The escorts for fallen service members came to be by a non profit called the Patriot Guard Riders. The PGR is a group of all volunteer motorcycle riders (although not required) born to protect fallen soldiers from after 9/11. They are committed to making sure no one is treated in the disrespectful manner those coming home from Vietnam were.

Wingnut is a member of the American Veteran Motorcycle Club.

There are currently six chapters in Oklahoma and close to twenty in other states. He agreed that MC's get a bad rap, while noting that his chapter participates in more than 25 events each year, many of which support veterans and veteran causes. The day after we met, the AVMC were riding in an event that supported the Claremore Veterans Center.

I asked Wingnut what being a member of AVMC meant to him. He said he felt a sense of brotherhood and camaraderie amongst people who understand and are supportive of each other. They are a "band of brothers" who have all served or are still serving, in all branches of the military. In a statement following the escort the day we met, the AVMC said "The American Veterans Motorcycle Club, Affiliates Motorcycle Club along with several other veteran motorcycle associations, had the honor of escorting Army Combat Engineer



Escort line up for fallen soldier at Tulsa International Airport.

Tanner Keagan Gene Hodges home to Miami, Oklahoma. It was a solemn privilege for the AVMC to stand in support of a fellow service member and his family to ensure he was escorted home with the respect and honor he earned through his service.”

The fallen service member from Ft. Carson was SGT Benjamin Pennington.

May they both rest in peace. That kind of honor and respect comes from more than just a motorcycle club. ● by Jill Stephenson, staff writer

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Operation Epic Fury: News Outlets Report Tinker E-3 AWACS Destroyed

Multiple news outlets reported an E-3 Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS) aircraft was damaged or destroyed between March 27-29, 2026, at Prince Sultan Air Base, Saudi Arabia. The likely cause was Iranian missiles and/or drones, according to Air and Space Forces Magazine, Microsoft Network (MSN), The Defense News and others. Images confirmed significant structural damage, including to the rear fuselage.

A request was sent to USCENTCOM for information on whether an E-3 was damaged and if any U.S. military or civilians were hurt in the attack but no response was received by presstime. As of April 25, 2026, nothing on the subject is posted on their website. Not providing information like this is routine for operational security reasons to deny enemies useful information.

A March 28 Air and Space Forces (AFA) news release stated, "The attack injured more than 10 service members, two seriously. Among the other planes damaged are aerial refueling tankers... The image appears to show one of the E-3s stationed at the Saudi base, based on runway signage and aircraft markings. Six E-3s had been stationed at Prince Sultan Air Base before the incident, according to open-source flight tracking data."

A MSN.com report from April 4 said, "The strike also damaged at least two US refueling aircraft and wounded 12 personnel, two seriously... With only 16 operational aircraft and a mission-capable rate of about 56%, the fleet is already under strain. Experts warn the loss will hamper the Air Force's ability to manage battlefields, deconflict airspace, and deliver coordinated effects in ongoing operations."

The AWACS aircraft are critical components of the Joint Force Air Component Commander's arsenal during combat operations like Operation Epic Fury. The Air Force has flown AWACS planes since the late 1970s to provide command and control and intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance capabilities. They were used extensively in Operation Desert Storm, the Kosovo war, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and for Operation Inherent Resolve.

"The loss of this E-3 is incredibly problematic, given how crucial these battle managers are to everything from airspace deconfliction, aircraft deconfliction, targeting, and providing other lethal effects that the entire force needs for the battle space," said Heather Penney for the AFA Magazine. She is a former F-16 pilot and director of studies and research at AFA's Mitchell Institute for Aerospace Studies. "The value of the E-3 and the battle managers is they see the big picture," Penney said. "They're the chessmaster, while [fighter pilots] are the bishops."

Lee McCullum, a former 552nd Air Control Wing (552 ACW) radio operator for the AWACS and VFW Post 7192 member, said, "I don't think we planned it right. We did know that Iran was going to hit the neighboring places, states, or whatever. I wish they would move to E3 back somewhere (perhaps) Aviana, Italy." His hopes and prayers go out to the members and families affected. Veterans of Operation Desert Storm remember Iraq fired numerous SCUD missiles at military installations in Saudi Arabia, including Riyadh. History repeated.

The MSN.com article also stated, "Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky alleged that Russian satellites photographed the Saudi base multiple times in the week before the attack and shared



E-3 #0005 belonging to the 552 ACW, Tinker AFB, destroyed on Mar 30, 2026, Prince Sultan Air Base, Saudi Arabia.X



An E-3 AWACS sits destroyed at Prince Sultan Air Base, Saudi Arabia. Photo obtained by NBC News

the imagery with Iran. He argued this pattern indicated deliberate targeting preparation, though NBC noted no direct evidence was provided."

The 552 ACW operates E-3s at Tinker AFB. The wing reports to 15th Air Force headquartered at Shaw Air Force Base, SC. According to an USAF Fact Sheet posted online, the wing consists of four subordinate units: the 552nd Operations Group, the 552nd Maintenance Group, the 552nd Air Control Group, and the 552nd Training Group. "The 552nd Maintenance Group directs logistics support of 27 E-3 AWACS aircraft (several news outlets state there are 16 aircraft in the inventory) valued at \$9.2 billion. The group supports all E-3 sorties enabling aircrews to fly 20,500 hours annually from numerous locations world-wide."

A USCENTCOM fact sheet dated April 1 states more than 13,000 combat flights have been flown (jet, helicopter, drone, etc.) and 12,300 targets struck and 155 or more Iranian vessels damaged or sunk.

For more information about Operation Epic Fury, go to www.airandspaceforces.com and major news sources or scan this QR CODE. ● Story by Lt. Col. Richard Stephens, Jr., USAFR, Ret. website: [Rich Travel Niche](http://RichTravelNiche.com)





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After 88 Years, Holdenville's "No-Name Creek" Gets One

Is there a creek, stream or river near your town that is unnamed with the State of Oklahoma? Perhaps not. But stay with this story if you want to read how Captain (retired) Doyle Tampleton, a tenacious Marine Corps member (aren't they all?) with American Legion Post 32 got a 1.5-mile-long creek that runs through Holdenville named for veterans and when the creek will be publicly commemorated.

Why name a creek anyway? To honor veterans, Tampleton said, to include Muscogee (Creek) Native Americans employed by the Works Progress Administration (WPA) in Holdenville from 1938-1940. He also wants "to help others understand the complexity involved, so they can name an unnamed creek."

Creek Construction

While in high school in 1959-1960, Tampleton worked in Charlie Sims' Grocery Store. He remembers a Native American named Harjo, a Marine veteran. "I was very impressed by all the tales he told about how this creek was built. And he was the foreman that oversaw the workers of the creek."

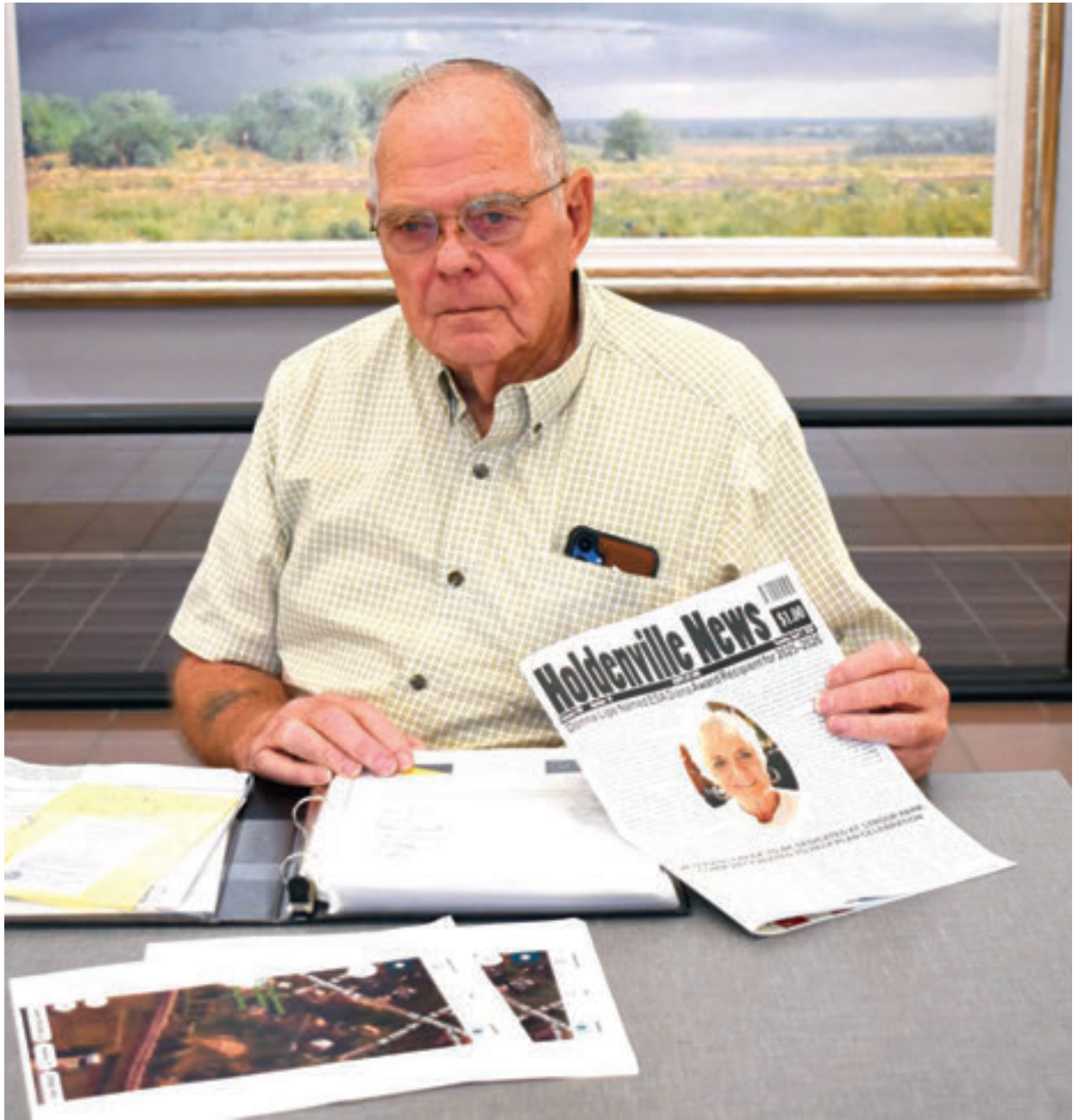
Tampleton said the creek was dug with picks and shovels. Sandstone rocks were brought and dropped at one centralized point. "They made skids like pallets that traveled and they loaded these stones on these skids, and they would hitch on a mule or a horse and drag 'em down this creek where they would concrete them in and make a channelized creek." Backbreaking work during the Depression years for \$40 a week.

About the Creek

The creek's headwaters originate in Holdenville. It flows into Tiger Creek five miles north of the city, becomes Wewoka Creek, and finally, joins the North Canadian River.

Process Starts at a National Level

Tampleton discovered the U.S. Board on Geographic Names (BGN), Washington D.C., approves geographic features such as creeks and mountains. The BGN sent him a 13-page application which plainly stated it may take three years to complete. "You have to have the city, the county, the state, any Native American



It took two-and-a-half-years for Doyle Tampleton of Holdenville to get approval from local, state and federal offices to name Holdenville's Veterans Park.

property affected. And it all has to be related to who you wish it to be named after."

Starting Local to get Approval

In September 2023, Tampleton's American Legion post approved his quest. That was followed by in-person and written requests to the Holdenville City Council and Hughes County Commissioner. David Smith, State Representative House District 18, approved the request in November 2024.

Approval from the Muskogee (Creek) Nation in Okmulgee was needed because Holdenville is in their reservation. "I sent a lot of letters and on the phone talked to various parts of that nation, like the veterans, cultural and historical desks." Result? David Hill, their Principal Chief, supported the proposal in April 2025.

State, Congressional and National Approval

Tampleton and Lou Jean, his wife, met with Senator James Langford's staff in Tulsa. After staffers said they could help, they informed him that permission from the Oklahoma Board of Geographic Names (OBGN) was needed. Another step to complete. Cesalea Ray, Chairman of the OBGN, came to Holdenville, saw the creek and gathered more information.

Final Steps

In December 2025, the BGN approved the creek's name. Done? Nearly. The Geographic Names and Information System (GNIS) office, a section of the BGN, needed to provide coordinates of the beginning and ending of the creek for topographical maps. This was



Holdenville's Stroup Park with the newly named Veteran Creek running through it. The creek fills during rain storms.

completed in January 2026.

This February, the OGBN approved the name, Veterans Creek, in an email which read in part, "The name Tvstvnke Hvccuce (Warrior Creek in Muscogee Creek), phonetically pronounced, Dust-Dun-Uh-Gey Huh-Jo-Jee, has been added to the GNIS with Feature ID 2833026." State and federal approvals complete!

Public Dedication

On June 20, at 10:00 a.m. in Holdenville's Stroup Park, officials will publicly dedicate Veterans Creek with a big celebration. The creek's sign, "Veterans Creek" on one side and "Tvstvnke Hvccuce" on the other, will be uncovered. Attendees will include U.S. Representative Josh Brecheen, State Senator Jonathan Winguard, David Smith, a representative from Senator Lankford's office, Holdenville officials and veteran groups.

Tampleton's biography

Tampleton enlisted in the Marine Corps in 1960, became a warrant officer and commissioned officer, and retired in 1985. He served in the Vietnam War south of Da Nang for 20 months and received two Purple Hearts. He was a police officer for nine years, school board representative for two years and President of the Central Oklahoma Military Officers Association of America for three years.

Captain Tampleton's tenacity to name Holdenville's creek for veterans, despite a two-year, five-month period that required numerous details and approvals, resulted in success. For more information, go to U.S. Board on Geographic Names. ●

story and photos by Lt Col Richard Stephens, Jr., USAFR, Ret.



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Medal of Honor Day at Tulsa International Airport



Above: Medal of Honor recipient SPC5 Dwight Birdwell Frederick.

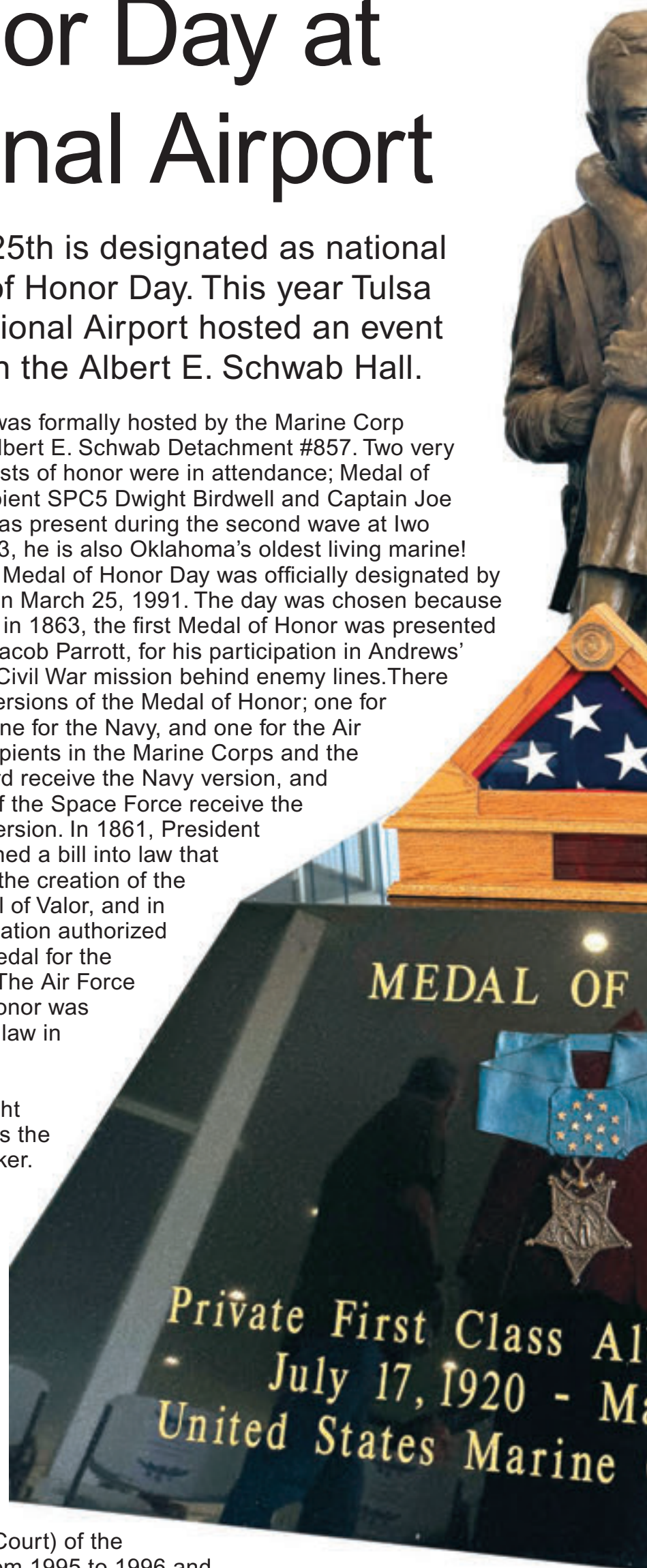
speech short and focused on the valor of the men he served with who didn't come home and to helping our veterans nationwide. Staying true to every MOH recipient I have had the privilege to meet, he was humble as the day is long. He is a citizen of the Cherokee Nation and entered the Army on May 24, 1966. In addition to his medal of Honor, Birdwell earned two Silver Stars, a Bronze Star for meritorious service and two Purple Hearts. He received the first Silver Star for heroism on January 31, 1968, when his unit defended Tan Son Nhut Air Base during the Tet Offensive in Vietnam. This is the medal that was eventually upgraded to the MOH, which was presented to him at the White House on July 5, 2022.

Birdwell was a member of the Judicial Appeals Tribunal (Supreme Court) of the Cherokee Nation from 1987 to 1999, serving as its Chief Justice from 1995 to 1996 and

March 25th is designated as national Medal of Honor Day. This year Tulsa International Airport hosted an event onsite in the Albert E. Schwab Hall.

The event was formally hosted by the Marine Corp League's Albert E. Schwab Detachment #857. Two very special guests of honor were in attendance; Medal of Honor recipient SPC5 Dwight Birdwell and Captain Joe Ihle, who was present during the second wave at Iwo Jima. At 103, he is also Oklahoma's oldest living marine! Semper Fi! Medal of Honor Day was officially designated by Congress on March 25, 1991. The day was chosen because on that day in 1863, the first Medal of Honor was presented to Private Jacob Parrott, for his participation in Andrews' Raiders, a Civil War mission behind enemy lines. There are three versions of the Medal of Honor; one for the Army, one for the Navy, and one for the Air Force. Recipients in the Marine Corps and the Coast Guard receive the Navy version, and members of the Space Force receive the Air Force version. In 1861, President Lincoln signed a bill into law that authorized the creation of the Navy Medal of Valor, and in 1862, legislation authorized a similar medal for the U.S. Army. The Air Force Medal of Honor was signed into law in 1956.

SPC5 Dwight Birdwell was the guest speaker. He kept his



1998 to 1999.

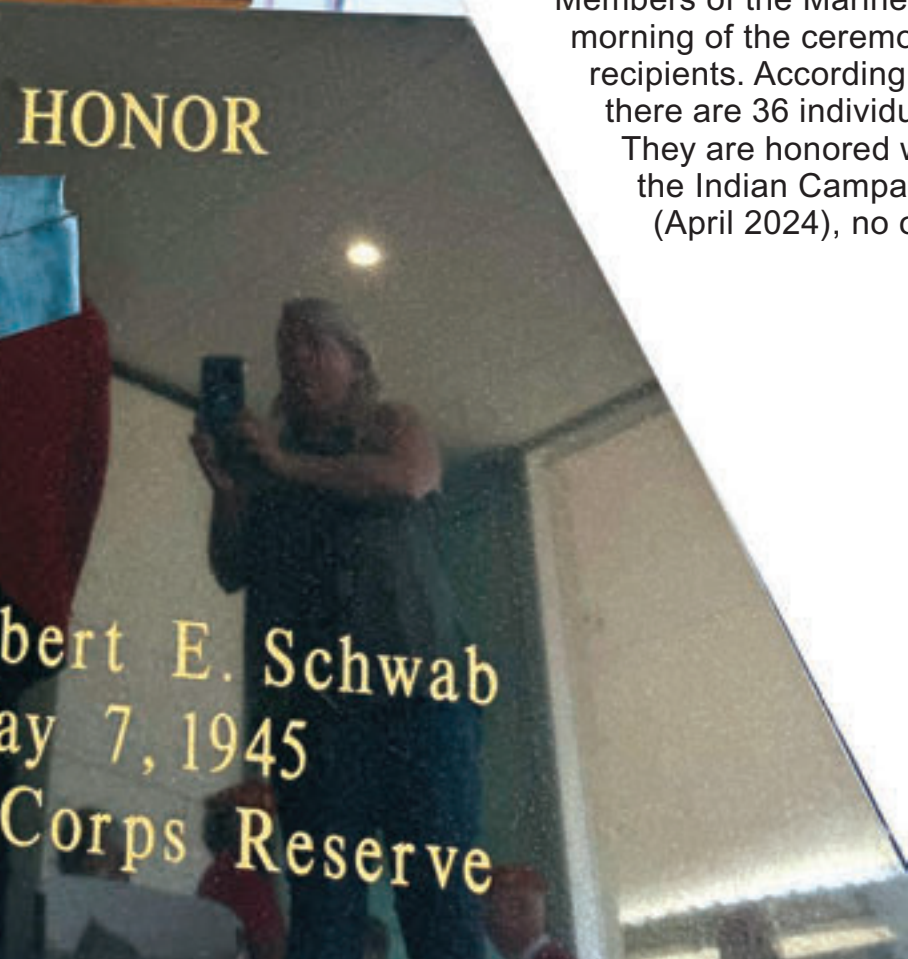
In my attempt to interview CPT Ihle, I found him to be equally as humble as Birdwell. At 103, he is also incredibly spry and sharp. He was not interested in having any attention drawn to his service during WWII or at Iwo Jima. He told me there were more than 50,000 other men that fought in that battle and that he didn't do anything more extraordinary than the rest. I gently reminded him that the fact that he was still alive was a reflection of the grit he still possessed that was surely present during his time of service. My grandfather, whom I loved and admired dearly, also served in WWII. There is no human alive today whose presence I am more honored to be in than a WWII veteran. I smiled and firmly shook CPT Ihle's hand as I shared this thought with him. That made him smile too, however, I did not press him to tell me any more about himself. Being in his presence was enough of a gift.

During the ceremony, citations were read for three additional Oklahoma Medal of Honor recipients. One of them was for PFC Albert E. Schwab, (the namesake of the hall the ceremony was held in), whose medal was posthumously awarded for his valiant actions on May 7, 1945 at the Battle of Okinawa, Japan. His niece and nephew were in attendance. One of the others was for LTC Earnest Childers, a member of the Creek Nation, who earned his Medal of Honor for heroic actions on September 22, 1943, in Oliveto, Italy, during WWII. The Department of Veterans Affairs Outpatient Clinic in Tulsa is named in his honor.

Members of the Marine Corp League's Albert E. Schwab Detachment #857, spent the morning of the ceremony visiting the graves of some of NE Oklahoma's other MOH recipients. According to the Oklahoma Military Heritage Foundation and state officials, there are 36 individuals with Oklahoma connections who have earned the Medal of Honor. They are honored with a dedicated plaque in the state Capitol from conflicts ranging from the Indian Campaigns to the Global War on Terrorism. At the time of the dedication (April 2024), no other state has an installation like it. ● by Jill Stephenson, staff writer



Above: Medal of Honor recipient Dwight Birdwell coin.



Okmulgee Sailor Supports Navy Missions Around the Globe

Aviation Electronics Technician 2nd Class Lakota Lancaster grew up far from the ocean in rural Okmulgee, Oklahoma, but now his work supports U.S. Navy missions and protects American interests worldwide.

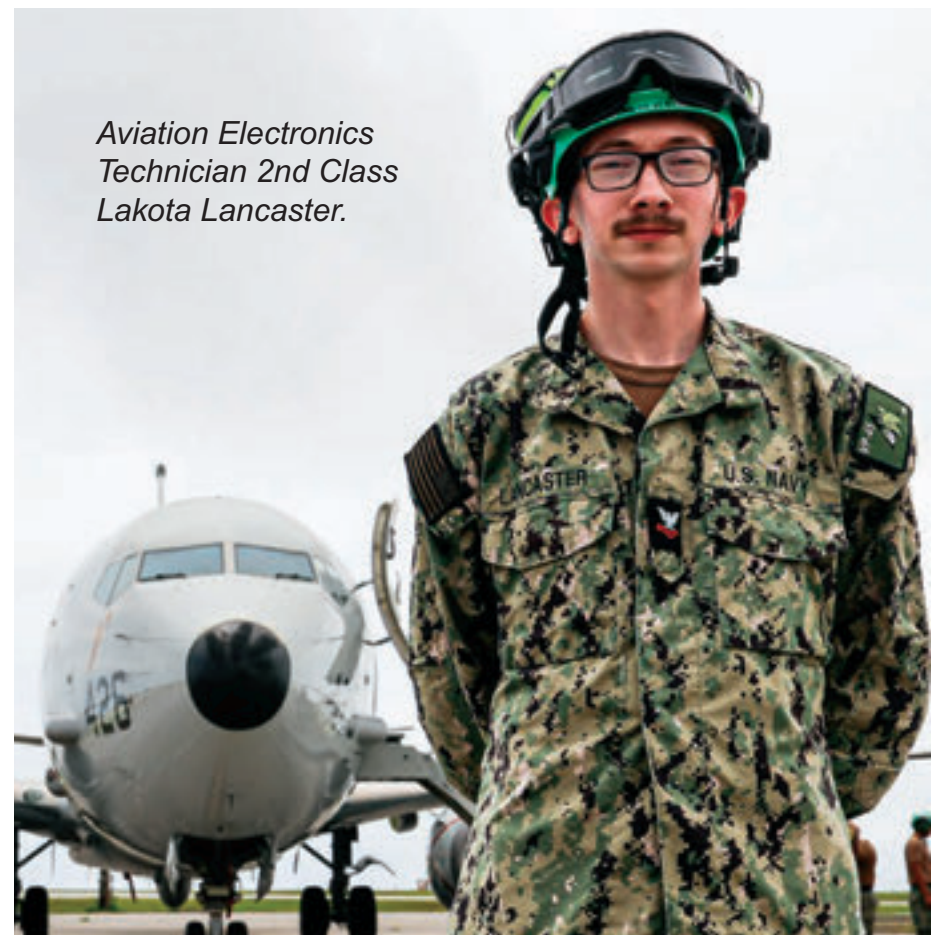
From a young age, Lancaster developed an interest in aircraft and aviation. After graduating from Preston High School in 2021, he enlisted in the Navy and was assigned to Patrol Squadron (VP) 45, a maritime patrol squadron based at Naval Air Station Jacksonville.

Known as the “Pelicans,” the squadron operates the P-8A Poseidon. As an aviation electronics technician, Lancaster maintains and repairs electronic systems on the aircraft. His work supports missions such as anti-surface warfare, intelligence gathering, surveillance, and search-and-rescue operations that rely on the aircraft’s radar, communication, and sensor systems.

One of Lancaster’s favorite parts of the Navy is the opportunity to travel.

“You get to go everywhere,” said Lancaster. “It doesn’t matter if you’re on a fixed-wing platform or a boat.”

During Lancaster’s time in the U.S. Navy, he traveled to seven countries, collaborating with allied partners during exercises such



*Aviation Electronics Technician 2nd Class
Lakota Lancaster.*

as Sea Dragon 2026 in Guam. Lancaster plans to continue serving and hopes to advance through the enlisted ranks with the goal of becoming a master chief petty officer.

Sea Dragon is a U.S.-led, multinational exercise designed to train anti-submarine warfare tactics and to operate together in response to maritime security challenges in the Indo-Pacific region.

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The Wall That Heals Visits Mitch Park

Oklahomans are invited to join Veterans May 14-17 at Mitch Park in Edmond to experience The Wall That Heals, a three-quarter scale replica of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C. This traveling wall honors the men and women who gave their lives in Vietnam or later died as a result of their service.

"I often enjoy walking in Mitch Park. Having the Wall that Heals there will remind me of the friends I lost during the war and the human cost of the war," said retired Air Force Col. Chuck DeBellevue. "This will create a sacred and solemn place that helps bring a calmness to the memories of my kind and Vietnam Veterans and their families."

DeBellevue, 80, retired to Edmond in 1998 after a distinguished 30-year military career and has since been an active speaker to members of the local and veteran communities. His story as the highly decorated last American air ace on active duty, with six aerial victories in 1972 in an F-4 Phantom II above North Vietnam, is a source of patriotic pride and inspiration for all who hear it.

The Edmond VFW Post 4938 is hosting The Wall That Heals and is recruiting volunteers to assemble it. Through volunteer support, community partnerships, and public engagement, they invite everyone to take part in this shared act of remembrance.

The Mitch Park exhibit spans 375 feet in length and rises to 7.5 feet at its apex, constructed of Avonite, a durable synthetic granite. It features 140 numbered panels supported by an aluminum frame.

Modern LED lighting illuminates the memorial so names can be read clearly both day and night. Visitors are welcome to do name rubbings of individual service members as a meaningful and personal way to honor those listed.

The Wall's 140 panels contain the names of more than 58,000 Vietnam service members, 990 of whom are Oklahomans, ensuring accuracy and consistency with the original Memorial.

In addition to open viewing of The Wall, several special ceremonies and community events will take place during the four days. These moments honor specific groups, recognize service, and provide opportunities for reflection and remembrance.

May 14 - 9 a.m. Native American Vietnam Service Recognition Ceremony

A ceremony honoring the service and sacrifice of Native American veterans and their Nations who served during the Vietnam War.

May 14 - 6 p.m. Vietnam Veterans Welcome Home Ceremony

A long-overdue welcome home for Vietnam veterans, recognizing their service, sacrifice, and dedication.

May 15 - 6 p.m. HMONG SGU Recognition Ceremony

Honoring the Hmong Special Guerrilla Units who served alongside U.S. forces during the Vietnam War.

May 16 - 9 p.m. Light Up the Night - Oklahoma County MIA Tribute

A powerful evening tribute honoring the more than 100 Missing in Action service members from Oklahoma County during the Vietnam War. This ceremony will illuminate The Wall in remembrance of those who have not yet come home.

While traveling, the Walls That Heals are more accessible to many Oklahomans, highlighting their significance and encouraging community engagement. Oklahoma is graced with a permanent replica 80% the size of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall in Washington, D.C., dedicated on Veterans Day 2013 in Enid. This replica was retired to Enid after traveling the country, measuring 380 feet long and 8 feet high at its tallest point, and made of anodized aluminum.

Gov. Mary Fallin proclaimed it Oklahoma's Official Vietnam War Memorial. The memorial reminds patriots that freedom is not free, is open to the public and free of charge from 7 a.m. to 9 p.m. year-round, encouraging ongoing engagement and respect.



Retired USAF Col. Charles (Chuck) DeBellevue poses in his formal mess dress at a Veterans charity event at Gaillardia Country Club in Oklahoma City.

The Wall stands at Woodring Regional Airport. "It is a somber reminder of those who gave their lives so we can live in freedom, and a tribute to honor our men and women who are serving or have served in the military," said Gov. Fallin in 2013 at its dedication.

The Living Walls, located across the street from the Vietnam War Memorial in Enid, honor and remember our military heroes. It is dedicated to Oklahoma veterans, active duty, retired, MIA, those killed while serving, and those who made the ultimate sacrifice, fostering pride and respect among visitors.

Just west of the site is the M.L. Becker Educational Center, a collection of permanent and temporary exhibits featuring patriotic, military and war-related memorabilia. The center won a 2019 Oklahoma Museums Association award for Education and Outreach. The center is open by appointment only for student groups, except on Vietnam Veterans Day and Memorial Days, when it is open all day.

Vietnam Veterans have been the focus of a groundswell of recognition over the past 14 years as the U.S. government has executed a sustained, multi-administration effort to provide "overdue recognition" to Vietnam-era Veterans.

The 50th Anniversary Commemoration (2012-2025), authorized by Congress and launched in 2012, was designed to thank and honor the 9 million Americans who served on active duty between November 1, 1955, and May 15, 1975.

This congressional mandate's primary objective was to "right a wrong" for Veterans who were often ignored or mistreated upon their initial return home.

In reaction to this effort, more than 11,000 local, state, and national organizations, such as the VFW, have partnered with the Department of Defense to host thousands of community-based events.

The Vietnam War Veterans Recognition Act of 2017 codified the nation's commitment to Vietnam Veterans by establishing March 29 as National Vietnam War



Vietnam Veteran's Memorial in Washington, D.C.

Veterans Day.

That date was chosen because it marks the anniversary of when the last U.S. combat troops departed Vietnam, and the last prisoners of war were released in 1973. The act added March 29 to the list of days on which the U.S. flag should be specifically displayed to honor these Veterans.

A central feature of the 50th-anniversary efforts has been the distribution of Vietnam Veteran Lapel Pins in formal ceremonies as a "Token of Gratitude": These pins, featuring the message "A Grateful Nation Thanks and Honors You," were presented at public ceremonies to provide a "welcome home" that many never received. Since 2012, more than 3 million Veterans have been publicly thanked at more than 21,000 ceremonies.

Most importantly, recognition has also shifted toward addressing the long-term physical toll of the war with expanded health research and benefits.

The VA launched the Vietnam Era Health Retrospective Observational Study in 2016, the most comprehensive health assessment of this Veteran group since the 1980s, focusing on the impacts of Agent Orange and PTSD.

And most recently, the new PACT Act integration at the VA in recent years has been offering toxic exposure screenings and expanded healthcare enrollment specifically for Vietnam-era Veterans. ● story by *Darl Devault, contributing editor*

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By Freddy Groves

Veteran Suicide Prevention



Across the country, state and local governments, nonprofits, certain tribes and other community organizations are going to share in a \$112 million grant program for their work in veterans suicide prevention. The Staff Sergeant Parker Gordon Fox Suicide Prevention Grant Program (also known as SSG Fox SPGP) promotes outreach to identify veterans at risk, clinical services for emergency treatment, case management, baseline screening, education, peer support, help with connecting with benefits and more. Help can also be in the form of temporary income support, legal services, child care, financial counseling and fiduciary help. And it works: Over 90% of

veterans who got these services reported improvements in their mental health and well-being.

The grant organizations will work with local VA medical centers to verify that the individual is a veteran, has some risk factors (such as traumatic brain injury, recent loss, homelessness or history of abuse) and has been assessed as to the degree of risk of suicide.

Veteran suicide stats are, as they always have been, grim to consider. The national suicide report for 2025 says that the number of suicides have decreased (for 2023, the last year numbers were available). Specifically, 2023 had 44 fewer veteran suicides than in 2022. The report calls that an “encouraging” result -- even though the number for 2023 was a whopping 6,398 veterans.

In an analysis of the stats, 61% of those veterans were not getting VA health care. The group most affected were veterans ages 18 to 34 with risk factors of homelessness, health problems and pain, with pain being the biggest

risk factor.

To learn all the details about the SSG Fox SPGP grant program, see www.mentalhealth.va.gov/ssgfox-grants/docs/SSG-Fox-SPGP-Program-Guide-508.pdf OR scan the QR CODE below.

If you (or a veteran you know) are at risk for suicide, call the VA crisis hotline at 988, then press 1.

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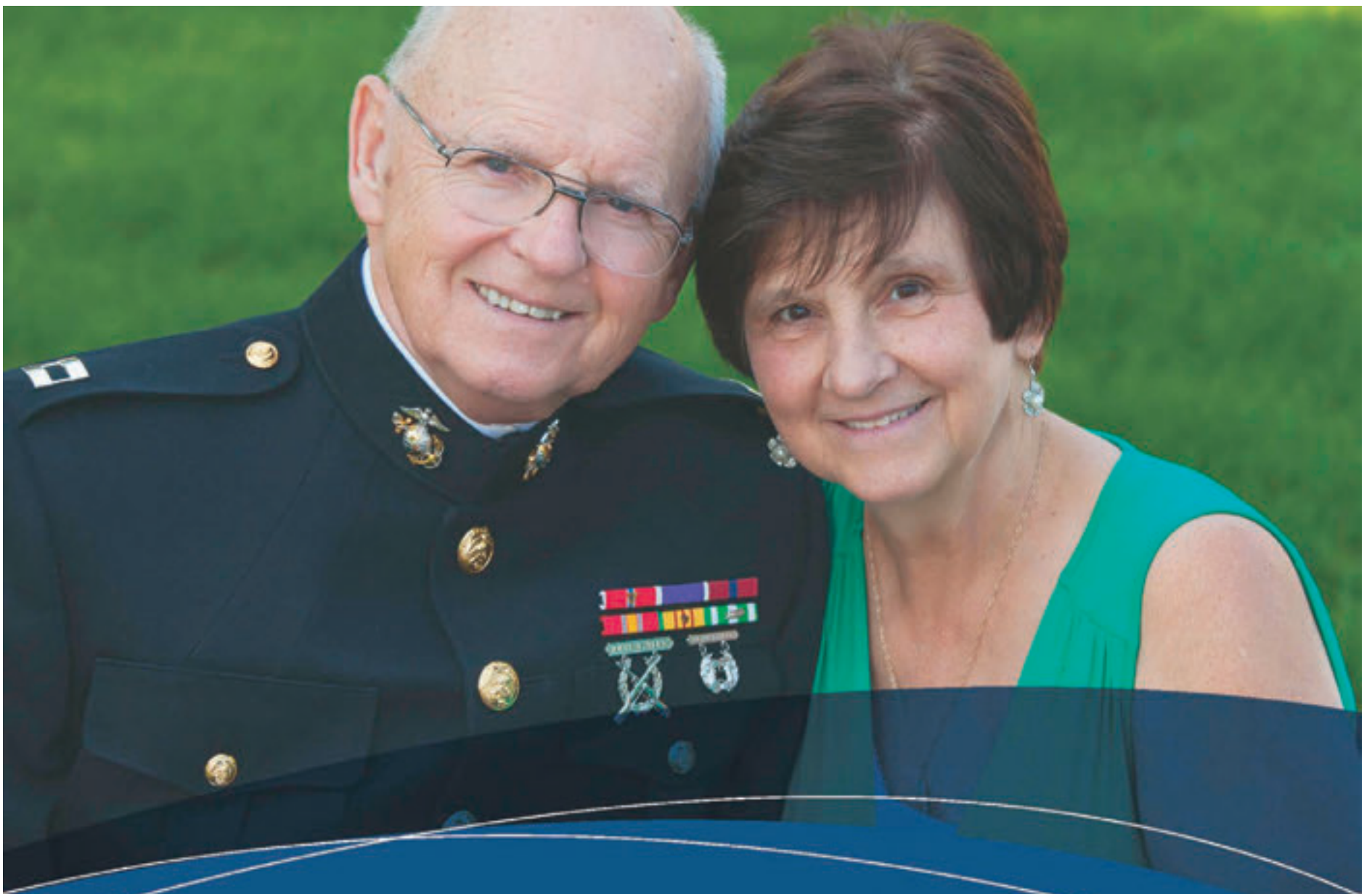
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- Assistance with College Admissions
- Develop your Academic Skill
- Referrals to Community and Veteran Services and Agencies
- And More!



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405.422.1405
vub@redlandsc.edu

Memorial Day - The last Monday of May

federal law
speeches
Civil War
funeral
Abraham Lincoln
dedication
decorate
tradition
commemoration
recognition

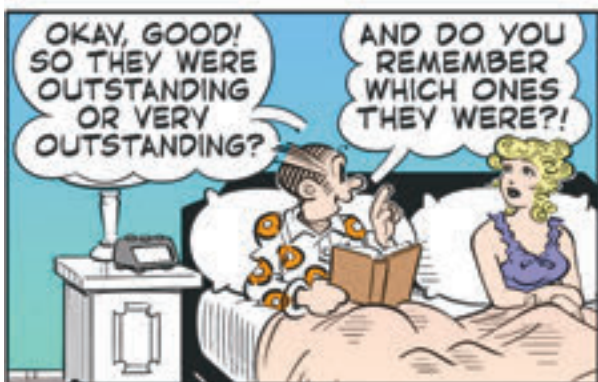
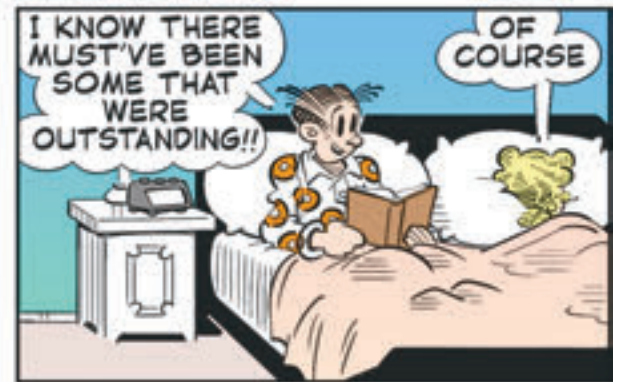
national
American flags
Volunteers
mourn
observance
Union soldiers
Decoration Day
last Monday
military
holiday

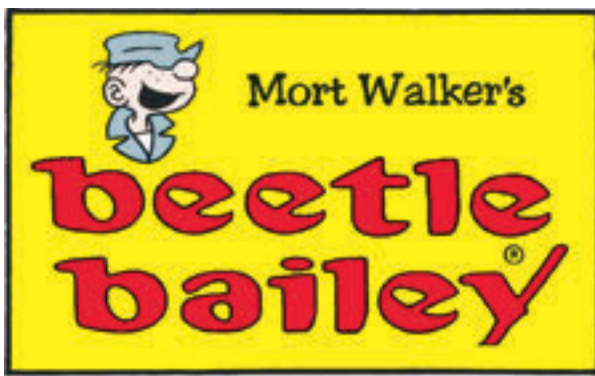
U L B Z A N C Q J S Z Z S K V U E E L Z D N P J
V U A L P H I G F P D O U Y N Q L V G E U X D A
P G P R F R F L F K K O Z I B A W G C V S L W N
T V G C E V T M S K I H O C S N C O A J F C O R
T A X U I N H M F V Z N V T X N R D U V I I P N
V F H X T V U S V E S G M F X A R L O K T C K A
U Q C I D E I F N O S O V R T T B L H A W F H B
K T E R B M S L L X N L F E T R U Y R N M S A R
B T W Q E T I D W D P Y O I K N A O P F U T A A
W T I S B C I L A A W I R C T B M D I K K U Z H
Q P G G W E O Y I R R X T E V E V R I C H I R A
Y D P W R X D G L T Y S E R M W J T V T L E P M
F A F S S Q B V N T A R H M L Y W G S U I X D L
E X D P G N T W Z I S R O N O N E K B A F O O I
D O M I A H U P D C T C Y S B D Y E F B R O N N
E T O N L G W C O M A I S P E E C H E S F X K C
R I U A X O O B Y A D N O I T A R O C E D E M O
A A R M D I H B S R K C R N N S S Q B A W T W L
L O N F C N Z V I O L Q L A N O I T A N H U C N
L C A W S L L M E V N D B D F C J S C E M D P R
A C K O B S E R V A N C E C D E D I C A T I O N
W L W B X W T G D P R I B Y Y O C I J A M E K K
V V Q A F E T A T S A M E R I C A N F L A G S P
M N D K T Y T Z L J H S D N K F R X E X T F V H



BLONDIE

BY SEAN YUKIE & JOHN MARSHALL





Have Questions?
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Medicare Products Broker
BS Health Studies – Gerontology
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Steven Sibley, US Army RET/DAV
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