OKLAHOMA VETERAN NEWSMAGAZINE
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A Tale of Two Countries:

Deserting One Nation's Military to Become Hero in Another

Part 2

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Above: On left is Robbie Richter and on the right, Jennifer Kruse, Marc Bishop's sisters. They are the grandchildren of Mildred (Tex) and Elizabeth Allison.



Elizabeth (Betts), Millard (Tex) and Sandy Allison, their first daughter, between 1945 - 1946. Photo from Marc Bishop













MORE INSIDE

A Tale of Two Countries: Deserting One to Fight for the Other. Corporal Allison, a tank crew commander during WWII, fought through France, Holland and Germany, keeping his crew alive to see V-E Day.



OKLAHOMA VETERAN
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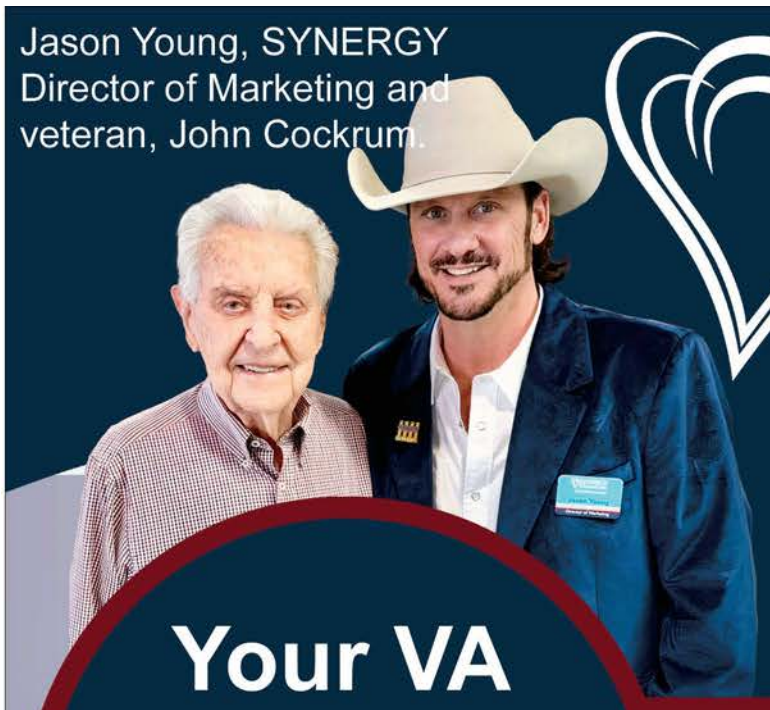
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Thomas Cook with owner, Weama Kassem.

On the Cover:

A Tale of Two Countries: Deserting One to Fight for the Other, Part 2



EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the second (part one appeared in last month's issue) of a three-part story on WWII hero Mildred Allison. Watch for the exciting conclusion in November's issue! If you didn't catch the first part in September's issue, read it online at www.okveterannews.com

Corporal Allison, a tank crew commander during WWII, fought through France, Holland and Germany, keeping his crew alive to see V-E Day.

Prologue. In September's Part 1 article, readers learned Mildred Allison was born dirt poor in Farrar, Texas, in 1913, picked cotton as a child with his family; enlisted in the United States Army from 1936-1939; and reenlisted in 1940. Assigned to Fort Lewis, Washington, near Canada, which was fighting during WWII, Allison decided he wanted to fight too. It was August 1941 and America was not at war. Although his Company Commander knew Allison's intentions, he approved a three-day pass. "August the 10th, 1941, I signed out of my unit…with no intention of returning," audio-taped Allison in retirement. Allison passed away in Midwest City, OK August 18, 1976 at age 62 and is burried with his wife Elizabeth in Norman, OK. His oldest daughter, Sandy Bishop, transcribed recordings for the family - and now the public. Most quotations are Allison's own words. Grandson Marc Bishop researched the story further.

Joining Canadian Army

Allison bought a one-way ticket to Vancouver, British Columbia, about 60 miles from Fort Lewis. "On Monday, Aug. 12, 1941, I was sworn in the Canadian Army as Millard Jasper Allison," informal name "Tex," without taking the oath of allegiance to the King of Canada. Sergeant Allison became a Corporal in the British Columbia Regiment.

A Bus Ride Leads to Romance

While training in St. Catherines, Ontario, he met his future wife, albeit in an unusual way. On a bus, Allison started escorting a black man sitting at the front to the rear. "This pretty, petite, four-foot-eleven-inch woman that could only weigh ninety pounds…stood up and walked right up to me. 'I don't know where you come from, soldier, but in Canada, we treat all people the same.'" Allison released the man and sat down behind the woman. He asked, "'Do you make it a habit of confronting strange men?' She turned sharply, looking me in the eyes. 'Only when they need to learn manners,'" she said.

Allison had met Elizabeth (Betts) Myrtle Garner. They had a whirlwind romance and married Jan. 8, 1942.

A Tank Man and Father

After the unit was redesignated from infantry to armor, they were renamed the 28th Armoured Regiment (British Columbia Regiment) and received training in Nova Scotia, Canada. Allison's wartime trade became "driver mechanic." Elizabeth returned to Montreal, where she had many friends, and gave birth to their first child, Sandra (Sandy), Aug. 5, 1942. The regiment deployed on Aug. 21, 1942, aboard a troop ship to England. There, the men completed extensive training in Kent. On July 28, 1944, seven weeks after the D-Day invasion, their unit landed at Sword Beach in Normandy and started executing their mission.

POW

"The Germans captured me on September the 22nd, 1944, and held me prisoner for nine days while I was tending the wounds of my troop leader." This was in France's hedgerow country. Allison was among 14 Canadians and 15 Polish Army Corps troops who were marched to Rouen and imprisoned in the Citadel. Freed by Free French of the Interior (FFI) after they attacked the Citadel, they assisted the FFI in killing Germans in Rouen. The Canadians met advancing British soldiers who gave them a half-ton truck and they headed back to their units.

Courage Under Fire

By mid-April 1945, Corporal Allison arrived in Germany. He was crew commander of a Sherman tank equipped with a 75-mm gun. On April 17, as lead tank of No. 3 Troop, B Squadron, Allison was ordered to

Corporal Millard (Tex) Allison stands at attention while meeting a British officer during WWII. Photo from Marc Bishop





From the left Distinguished Conduct Medal 1939-45 Star France and Germany Star Defence Medal Canadian Volunteer Service Medal with clasp War

push east with other tanks along a railway embankment about 20 feet above the ground. The exposed position left the tanks vulnerable to German tanks and anti-armor howitzers. Allison directed his crew to push a boxcar down the railway tracks with their tank, keeping it fairly hidden. "I suppose that was the only thing that saved us. We were in the open and 88's (88 mm anti-tank artillery gun) were trying to hit us…I was standing with my head out of my turret. I had to use my pistol and grenades and killed over fifty of the enemy as we advanced about 2,500 yards." German infantry had been advancing with "Panzerfausts," German bazookas. Allison's crew killed some of the attackers and held others at bay.

Allison noticed the tank of his troop commander, Captain Bell, on fire. He maneuvered his tank out of the line of fire, jumped out, and ran to Bell's tank. "I picked up Bill and carried him on my shoulder about three hundred yards to a barn." Allison returned to the destroyed tank twice more-once to carry Bell's operator to the barn and again to lead the remaining men there while shells fell around them.

Getting back in his tank, his crew kept fighting for another 36 hours. "We were able to knock out the anti-tank gun that took out Bill's tank. We stopped several infantry rushes against our own infantry and eliminated two German self-propelled guns and an armored infantry carrier."

He was told about 1,000 Germans died in the battle. The Liberation Route Europe website described the Küsten Canal as "a carefully defended position…In just three days, over 200 Canadian soldiers were killed or wounded."

After the war, Allison summarized his regiment's accomplishments. "We had fought through Belgium, Holland, France and we were within 45 or 50 miles of Berlin, Germany, when I left combat. I was sent to the hospital in Brussels for blood poisoning in my left hand from shrapnel I had received. This was five days before V-E Day, 5th of May, 1945." He experienced combat from September 1944 to May 1945. Corporal Millard Allison was honorably discharged from the Canadian Army on Nov 5, 1945.

Thoughts About Combat

• "You have to believe: it will not be you…You live and fight - one day at a time." • "I do not know who had the best soldiers. I think the best soldiers might have been the ones who were there for the adventure and excitement of the war." • "I tried to never feel the fear. The fear was there, but I never wanted my driver to know I was scared…Anyone who saw any action in the war and said they were not scared was either a damn liar or a fool."

Distinguished Conduct Medal (DCM)

Corporal Allison was awarded the DCM on Nov. 15, 1945, and 100 Canadian dollars for his actions during the battle of Kusten Canal. The DCM was the second highest medal that could be awarded by the British military. A letter from the Department of National Defence, Army, congratulated the Allisons "in recognition of gallant and distinguished services in the field."

Epilogue: Back Home

On Dec. 12, 1945, Allison's family left Canada and moved to Texas. He had been gone for four years. No job was waiting. Re-join the U.S. Army and finish his enlistment? Tex Allison didn't know it yet, but the U.S. Army wanted to see him about some unfinished business. And what kind of life would Elizabeth and Sandy - both Canadian citizens - experience?

In Part III, we follow the Allison's family life in Texas - and encounter one big, jarring bump in the road they must travel over. ● *Story by Retired Lt. Col. Richard Stephens, Jr., USAFR website: Rich Travel Niche*

Service, Ministry, Family Shape Vet Chaplain

Katrina Palan has spent her life moving between two callings: military service and ministry, each shaped profoundly by family.

Katrina comes from a lineage steeped in service. Her father, an Air Force veteran, flew for years as an Aircraft Commander, eventually logging over 15,000 flying hours and earning an Air Medal with three Oak Leaf Clusters. He and Katrina flew together regularly until a tragic Naval incident that claimed the lives of five brothers led to a policy change barring family members from flying together. Katrina's father and stepmother served in the Air Force and reserves during Vietnam.

Katrina joined the Air Force Reserve in 1978 through the Delayed Entry Program, enlisting three months before her high school graduation. Originally from Michigan, she relocated to Biloxi, Mississippi, following her father's assignment with the Weather Reconnaissance Squadron. Stationed at Keesler Air Force Base, she served with the 34th Air Weather Flight, the 815th Weather Reconnaissance Squadron and the 920th Air Wing. As a meteorologist and weather forecaster working closely with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association (NOAA), she flew as a "drop sonde operator," gathering data during hurricane reconnaissance missions and, in wartime, flying ahead of other aircraft to support refueling operations. Her service took her around the globe, even into the Arctic Circle. Her father notably served as the Aircraft Commander during her very first hurricane mission. For her efforts, Katrina earned an Air Medal of her own, a distinction requiring at least 15 penetrations into named storms. She served from 1978 to 1991, holding the rank of Technical Sergeant. She eventually stepped back from the reserves as the monthly call to duty became difficult to balance with her enjoyment of being a stay-at-home mother.

While serving in Mississippi, Katrina met her husband, an Air National Guard member from Pennsylvania who relocated to be near her after they met in February of 1980. The couple married that November and together raised three sons and one daughter. Their oldest followed his grandfather's path into aviation, attended the Air Force Academy and became a pilot. He served 25 years and earned a Distinguished Flying Cross for a mission in Afghanistan. The A-10 aircraft he flew during that mission has since been decommissioned, bears his name and is on display at the "Boneyard" in Arizona. He currently flies for United Parcel Service (UPS). Having come through ROTC at TCU, her youngest son served as an Artillery Officer in the Army for a total of ten years. A nephew continues the family's tradition of service as an Army National Guard gunner on Blackhawk helicopters.

Despite generations of military service, no one in her family has been injured or killed in the line of duty. Katrina often reflects on how fortunate they have been. Tragedy did touch the family in another way when Katrina's husband died in 2016. Two of her sons were actively serving at the time and were sent home by the Red Cross to be with her.

Katrina's path into ministry began later in life. At the age of 35 she felt called into service through a vivid dream. She came to understand it as a call to seminary. A friend showed





Top: Chaplain, Katrina Palan at the Coffee Bunker. Right: A younger Katrina Palan in uniform.

her a flier about Clinical Pastoral Education that set her on the road to chaplaincy. Her first role was at a Level One trauma center in Wichita, Kansas. She later returned to complete her undergraduate degree at Phillips Theological Seminary in Tulsa, all while continuing chaplaincy work with the Wichita Police Department and the Sedgwick County Sheriff's Department. Her ministry has since carried her through Ottawa, Kansas; Omaha, Nebraska; disaster chaplaincy work with the Salvation Army in Carlinville, Illinois; and service with the Broken Arrow Police Department. All of her chaplaincy roles have been volunteer positions. Her paid, full-time work has come through interim pastoral roles, filling pulpits between permanent hires.

For 33 years, Katrina has answered the call to serve as a chaplain, and she isn't ready to stop. She still feels there's more work for her to do. Since 2024, she has served at the Coffee Bunker as one of six chaplains and the first and only woman to hold that role. For years, because her service was in the reserves, she quietly doubted whether her military experience counted. At the Coffee Bunker, a place that welcomes anyone who raised their hand and took the



Katrina Palan and her son with the A-10 bearing his name.

oath, she has finally embraced her identity as a veteran and has been met with the gratitude and recognition that has eluded her for years. In her free time, Katrina enjoys spending time with her eleven grandchildren. ● *story by Jill Stephenson, contributing writer*



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Yukon Veteran Spreading Word About Warriors Honor Flights



Walter S. Johnson, a United States Army veteran took part in an Oklahoma Warriors Flight to Washington D.C. Pictured with him was his trip Guardian Aubrey Thomas.

Army 1st Sergeant (Ret.) Walter S. Johnson, of Yukon, took a trip of a lifetime when he joined other United States military veterans on a trip to the nation's capital on Oct.1, 2024 on the Oklahoma Warriors Honor Flight.

And now Johnson is spreading the word to other veterans interested in taking an Honor Flight.

The Oklahoma Warriors Honor Flight is a volunteer-driven program that flies Oklahoma veterans to Washington, D.C., to visit their war memorials at no cost, honoring their service and sacrifices.

Veterans on the Honor Flight visit key memorials, including the U.S. Marine War Memorial, Arlington National Cemetery, the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, and the Vietnam, Korean, and World War II Memorials.

"I was very humbled, grateful, and honored," Johnson said. "The Honor Flights are a 501(c)(3) organization of volunteers that schedule flights every year. The trip is free, which covers everything. Costs are covered by donations, corporate sponsors, grants, and fundraisers. The Honor Flight Network has 129 hubs in 44 states."

According to the Tulsa Beacon website www.tulsabeacon.com, on Oct. 7, 2025, 67 Oklahoma veterans participated in the Honor Flight, including 62 Vietnam War veterans, 3 Korean War veterans, and 2 who served in both conflicts. The event included a send-off ceremony at the Hard Rock Hotel & Casino in Tulsa and a Welcome Home celebration at Tulsa International Airport, where the public was invited to cheer and honor the returning veterans.

Gov. Kevin Stitt officially proclaimed the day as "Oklahoma Warriors Honor Flight Day" in recognition of the veterans and the nonprofit

A Maryland native, Johnson, had a 27-year career with the Maryland State Police. He served three years in the Army.

Johnson traveled with a retired Air Force friend to Tulsa to catch their Oklahoma Warriors Honor Flight.

"I traveled to the Tulsa area with my retired Air Force friend to a large hotel for coordination of our Meet and Greet, photos with Miss and Mrs. Oklahoma, dinner and a night's lodging," he said. "Our group consisted of 65 veterans, 65 guardians to assist each veteran, nine EMTs, and 10 other support personnel for a total of 149 people. All were volunteers. I was one of nine veterans from the Korean War, and the others were Vietnam veterans."

Each veteran is accompanied by a guardian, a volunteer responsible for their well-being during the trip. Guardians help with logistics, boarding, security, and ensuring veterans have a safe and memorable experience. The program is entirely volunteer-run, requiring thousands of hours to organize each flight.

Johnson was accompanied on the Honor Flight by Aubrey Thomas.

"He is a veteran and he served as my trip guardian," Johnson said. "He volunteered as a way to give back to other veterans."

Johnson said they spent eight hours in Washington D.C. taking a bus tour of all the war memorials, the United States Capitol building, the White House and Arlington National Cemetery.

"We also watched the changing of the guard at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier," he said. "I favored this one as it represented the past, present and future. They do that 24 hours, seven days a week, 365 days a year with strength and perseverance. In all our travels people honored and thanked us for our service."

Johnson said their buses were assisted with large police escorts, always present, front and rear.

"At one point they blocked a four-lane expressway with four police cars as we approached an entry ramp," he said.

Johnson said before leaving the airport building, a large crowd of about 400 well-wishers greeted them with thank-yous and hugs

as a band played with television crews filming their send-off home to Oklahoma.

"On the flight back, support personnel presented each veteran with a manila oval envelope with cards, letters of appreciation from well-wishers from around the country," Johnson said. "We opened this envelope up and talk about being humbled and grateful and thankful. Just a whole bunch of thank you letters, cards, and little trinkets, all kinds of stuff from people. Not from Oklahoma, but from all over the country. I responded to all of them and thanked them."

Johnson said feedback from other veterans from his Honor Flight was very positive.

"Their reaction was the same as mine. Very, very grateful, very humbling, just wonderful," he said. "They're surprised that it's not publicized. Nobody knows about it."

Johnson said he was thankful to be part of such a special journey.

"I'm humbled, grateful, and honored as an American to have been on this trip," he said. "Thanks to all that made it happen. I encourage all to visit the nation's capital. Very busy and patriotic visit with other veterans."

Johnson said the Oklahoma Warriors Honor Flight will occur in October in Tulsa before another Honor Flight in April 2027 from Oklahoma City.

He said the fall Honor Flights will continue from Tulsa while Oklahoma City will be home for the spring flights.

According to the website www.oklahomawarriors.org, it takes approximately 1,300-1,500 hands-on hours to bring each flight to fruition, and that's before they get off the ground.

The website states that organizers need help in a variety of areas including pre-flight operations, fundraising and speaker's bureau, communications, airport logistics, working on various clerical tasks from home, and much more.

Johnson, who does public speaking events, said he talks to people about Honor Flights.

"Veterans need to know about this," he said. "It's a wonderful program."

Veterans interested in participating can apply through the Oklahoma Warriors Honor Flight website at www.oklahomawarriors.org. or call Honor Flight Organizer Anthony Balderaz at (405)-669-7589.

Applications can be mailed to Oklahoma Warriors Honor Flight, P.O. Box 30605 Edmond, OK 73003 or via email to applications@oklahomawarriors.org ● *Story and photos by Van Mitchell, staff writer*



PhotoCon Grows to Add Car Show



Photographers attending the 2025 Rent Photoville session, where owner Jamie Landgren (second from right at bottom) explained the intricacies of photo booth marketing, photo by Darl DeVault.

Veterans are invited to attend PhotoCon OKC 2026, Oklahoma's only regional level three-day interactive photography skills advancement convention, as immersive as their military experience. The event will be held Oct. 29- 31 in OKC at Embassy Suites by Hilton OKC Northwest.

Celebrating its 13th year, Bedford Camera & Video's PhotoCon OKC helps photographers at every level bridge the gap between theoretical classroom learning and real-world application, much like Veterans preparing for their first duty station. The event is widely recognized as the region's largest photography and digital imaging show.

For more current information about the event, lodging discounts and special VIP access, visit www.photoconokc.com. Early-bird admission is $149, or $199 at the door, and the event benefits four local charities.

"PhotoCon fosters camaraderie between photographers from across the state and region that supports our creative endeavors," said Richard Clifton, long-time prolific Oklahoma City photographer. "The master class sessions have let me hear speakers I have idolized for years and followed on Facebook and YouTube."

The core of the educational experience is the lineup of two dozen expert speakers covering diverse genres. Instead of general advice, photographers can attend these targeted sessions to learn specific, actionable skills.

Keynote presentations include Hank Schyma and Kansas City Chiefs Director of Photography Steve Sanders.

Veterans can build technical mastery by learning complex workflows like astro-landscape photography and "night techniques" from experts like Tony Hebert, or dive into macro and nature photography with Don Hamilton.

Photographers are invited to move beyond camera settings by attending sessions on storytelling with Jason Domingues or learning how to generate income as an "Intentional Artist" with Brennen Nicole.

For photographers looking to expand into video, Ioannis Androitis is presenting on Sound for Visual Media & Podcasting, a critical skill for modern hybrid shooters.

The experiential learning, similar to military training, begins with building your portfolio and live shooting. This year, it offers its inaugural Open Car Show for more photography vistas on opening day.

Unlike typical conferences where attendees only listen, PhotoCon offers hands-on gear demos and live shooting scenarios that let them practice new techniques immediately.

The Thursday Night "Envoy Evening" kicks off with a free community night on Thursday, October 29. This includes live photo demos and model shoots, presenting a low-pressure environment to test gear and lighting setups before the main conference begins.

Throughout the weekend, attendees will have access to professional models for portfolio building. This is a rare opportunity to direct professional talent and capture high-quality images for websites or social media without the usual costs of hiring talent.

"Beyond PhotoCon, you see Bedford's support for the photographer striving to learn more when they host their Third Thursday night photo walks several months during the good weather months," Clifton said.

This spirit of support is strongest during PhotoCon, when expanding creative networks and growth often come from community critique and collaboration. The conference offers interactive photo walks, taking guided sessions out of the hotel to shoot alongside experts and allowing attendees to learn how professionals "see" light and composition in real time.

PhotoCon is designed to connect attendees with fellow creators, potential mentors, and brand representatives, facilitating the exchange of tips, location ideas, and business referrals.

The vendor-rich Expo floor lets attendees test proof-of-concept gear to build technical knowledge by physically testing equipment rather than relying on online reviews.

Attendees can test the latest camera bodies, lenses, and lighting modifiers from leading manufacturers such as Canon USA. This helps you understand exactly how new technology-such as mirrorless autofocus systems or off-camera flash-can solve specific problems in workflow.

A well-supported, popular photo-capture contest runs in the background during PhotoCon. This PhotoConTEST, a signature interactive event sponsored by Canon USA, runs continuously from opening night through the final day.

It is a real-time challenge where attendees apply what they learn immediately, turning the entire conference into their canvas.

Unlike traditional contests where you submit files online, this is a tactile, on-site experience. From the moment

the doors open on Thursday evening (October 29), attendees are encouraged to capture images that best capture the spirit of PhotoCon. This includes photos of the professional models, candid moments from the photo walks, and dynamic images of the gear and the crowd.

Instead of uploading a digital file, attendees visit the Canon Printer Booth on the expo floor. There, Canon experts will help print attendees' selected masterpiece (often a high-quality 13x19" print) at no charge as their official entry.

The printed image is then hung in the Hallway Gallery, creating a growing exhibition that expands throughout the weekend. This "Hallway of Fame" allows every attendee, speaker, and instructor to view, admire, and discuss the work, turning the venue into a living art gallery.

While the exact voting and judging mechanics can vary slightly year to year (often a mix of peer popularity and judge selection), the core "voting" typically involves a People's Choice and peer recognition.

During breaks, attendees walk the hallway, critiquing and admiring the prints. The "buzz" around specific images often drives the popular vote or influences the final selection.

The contest usually closes for entries by noon on Saturday, with winners announced at the closing ceremonies or during the afternoon prize drawings. Winners often receive significant prizes, such as new camera bodies, lenses, or substantial gift cards.

"Use the professional models to make the most of the dedicated shooting bays," Clifton said. "These controlled setups are designed to help you get a 'contest-worthy' shot using professional lighting."

● *Story and photos by Darl DeVault, contributing editor*





Faces of the Fallen: CPL Michael "Mikey" Thompson

By Jill Stephenson

U.S. Army, Oklahoma Army National Guard, KIA September 17, 2008.



Red River 44 Memorial Sign in Kuwait.



Kory and Mikey Thompson with Hershey, the family dog a short time before Mikey was killed.

In mid May a long time friend came to visit me. She came to visit family and attend a graduation party. We met many years ago while working together in Minnesota. We never talked much about her roots or her family from Oklahoma. Little did we know that years later, I would end up living near where she grew up. Sheryl and I were neighbors so she knew my son before he was killed in action. One of the family members she spent time with during her visit was her cousin Kory Thompson. Sheryl informed me that Kory had lost his son Michael in Iraq in 2008. She wondered if we knew each other. We didn't, however we discovered that we have mutual friends and were both likely at the Middle East Conflicts Wall in Marseilles, Illinois for an event several years ago. It's a small world.

Kory served in the Air Force for six years. His father served in the Army and Air Force during WWII and Korea.

Michael Thompson grew up in Kingston, Oklahoma. He graduated high school in 2003. Michael had wanted to be in the military since he was a little boy. The events of September 11th sharpened that pull, so did his best friend's example. He had joined the Marine Corps a year earlier and was part of the first push into Baghdad. Michael enlisted in the Army in early 2004.

Friends and family called him Mikey. With three Michaels in his class, he became "Mikey T." His fellow soldiers had another name for him: "EYRE," his middle name and an Irish family name. His father, Kory, had addressed letters to him that way, in all caps, and it stuck. They also called him "the packhorse" because he was a big man with a kid's heart, always willing to carry more than his share of the load.

Mikey joined the 1st Infantry Division out of Fort Riley, Kansas, and deployed with them in 2005-06. He left active duty service in early 2007, but soon discovered that civilian work didn't pay well and he missed the structure and discipline of the Army. A few months later he re-enlisted in the Oklahoma Army National Guard. When he heard the unit out of Lexington, Oklahoma needed infantry guys as open-door machine gunners, he asked his commander for a transfer. He got his wish.

On his second deployment, Thompson was serving as an open-door machine gunner aboard a CH-47 Chinook helicopter, call sign Red River 44, when the helicopter went down near Talil, Iraq. All seven soldiers on board were killed, including two other OK National Guardsmen; SGT. Daniel Eshbaugh and Chief Warrant Officer Brady Rudolf. Also killed were Chief Warrant Officer 2 Corry Edwards, SGT. Anthony Mason, 1st SGT. Julio Ordonez, and 1st LT. Robert Vallejo II.

Mikey was laid to rest at Shay Cemetery in Shay, Oklahoma. A shared memorial for the crew of Red River 44 stands at the Dallas-Fort Worth National Cemetery.

Mikey's obituary described him as "happiest with a gun or a fishing pole in his hand, never met a stranger, and would give anyone the shirt off his back and the last dollar out of his pocket."

In 2010, a 17-mile stretch of State Highway 70 was designated as the CPL Michael Thompson Memorial Highway. It runs from the west side of the Roosevelt Bridge through the town of Kingston where Mikey grew up.

Mikey's father shared that there are still things about the notification day he doesn't remember. He says you can never be who you were before your child died. Within a year of Mikey's death, Kory joined the Patriot Guard Riders. Standing in flag lines honoring the fallen for other grieving families helped save him. He did this almost daily, until it grew too painful to continue. Michael's brother, Tommy, died three years ago at age 46 from a heart attack. Kory's takeaway is this: "Life is about the dash between the dates. We should make the most of it while we are still here."

For ten years, Mikey's friends held an annual memorial swim at Lake Texoma in his honor, raising scholarship funds for his high school. Twelve children have been named after him. The boys have been given his first name, and the girls his middle name, Eyre. For this reason and for the friend he was to many, Mikey lives on and will not be forgotten. ●

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Inductees of 2025's Military Hall of Fame pose together in Norman.

Oklahoma Honors Twelve Heroes at Military Hall of Fame

The Oklahoma Military Hall of Fame will celebrate its 27th Banquet and Induction Ceremony on Nov. 7 at the Embassy Suites, Norman. This year's class includes 12 living and deceased service members representing all services and all ranks and the Oklahoma Dustoff/Medevac Crews of the Vietnam War. Their achievements are as numerous and inspiring as those who have been inducted.

The formal event drew almost 600 attendees in 2025, according to retired Col. Kelly Zachgo, President of the Oklahoma Military Heritage Foundation, who operates the Hall of Fame. Zachgo added, "Our banquet is nothing like you have or will see anywhere else. Patriotism abounds; fantastic entertainment. Watch our combined Honor Guard made up of Pawnee, Cherokee, and Comanche tribal members carrying flags to the beat of drummers and singers. The stories you hear will resonate with you forever. Oklahoma does it right!

Families, friends and corporate sponsors like the Tinker Federal Credit Union attend to celebrate the honorees. The 145th Army Band will perform patriotic music.

Retired Maj. Gen. Douglas O. Dollar, who founded the Hall of Fame, explained the purpose behind the ceremony. "We try to honor veterans for one thing, for valor. They've been outstanding in combat. The other criteria is that they may have done community/public service for veterans, and they certainly deserve recognition and encouragement. Also, I think it's very important to educate the public, especially the state's youth, about military service and the remarkable stories of Oklahoman service."

A trained "Ambassador" works closely with each honoree or their family, if deceased, to ensure their attendance is enjoyable. Lt. Jim Locke said, "As the Ambassador for the induction of the DustOff Association and members from Oklahoma, it is my distinct honor to represent the only group dedicated to not taking lives, but to saves lives in combat…A true life-saving mission who rarely landed, but hovered, to take the wounded out."

Inductees are selected through a rigorous process to ensure Oklahoma's most worthy are chosen. Candidates must have a connection to Oklahoma, full biographical information, outstanding civilian and/or patriotic service and most importantly, according to the Hall of Fame's website, "The military record…must demonstrate heroic and/or extraordinary leadership action, service, or sacrifice; and principal awards received."

Seating for the ceremony begins at 6:00 p.m. and the program starts at 6:30 p.m. The Embassy Suites Norman is at 2501 Conference Drive, Norman, Oklahoma. Seating is $95 per person, with a check, credit card or online payment due by Oct 28. Dress is Sunday best, business suit, Service Uniform or Mess Dress. For event details and to reserve seats, visit www.OKMHF.ORG or email INFO@OKMHF.ORG.

Synopsis of several inductees

Capt. Ivan J. Weaber, U.S. Army, 1907-1945, and 2nd Lt. George S. Weaber, U.S. Marine Corps, 1919-1944, were brothers who were born in Dacoma, OK, graduated from Enid High School and attended OK A&M College before entering the military during WWII. Capt. Ivan J. Weaber died in 1945 onboard a Japanese

"Hell Ship" after being captured by the Japanese and imprisoned at Cabanatuan. He was awarded the Silver Star, Bronze Star, and POW Medal. As a member of the 5th Marine Division, Lt. George Weaber died in 1944 after exposing himself to attract enemy fire and was posthumously awarded a Silver Star and Purple Heart.

Sergeant Mad Bear, U.S. Army, 1847- 1913. Sergeant Mad Bear was born in Nebraska in 1847 and is a citizen of the Pawnee Nation. During the Indian Wars of 1865-1877, he was assigned to the 5th Cavalry Regiment. During an engagement with Cheyenne warriors led by Tall Bull, he mounted his horse, attacked the enemy, and was wounded in the hip. Mad Bear became the first indigenous recipient of the Medal of Honor.

Oklahoma Dustoff / Medevac Crews of the Vietnam War, U.S. Army. In Vietnam, the extraordinary courage, skill, and selfless service of helicopter pilots and crews known by the call signs "Dustoff" and "Medevac" helped save 900,000 wounded soldiers. In September 2024, Congress awarded these crewmembers the Congressional Gold Medal. Oklahomans were among these elite rescue crews.

MG Doug Dollar Distinguished Public Service Award

Brigadier General Ben T. Robinson, U.S. Air Force. As an Army helicopter pilot from 1969-1972, he flew 100 combat missions in Vietnam. Later, after joining the Air Force, he earned his fixed pilot wings. He commanded the 552nd Air Control Wing during his final tour at Tinker AFB. Robinson advanced STEM education and aerospace opportunities in Oklahoma, and since 2013, has been a docent at the National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum. ●

Story by Retired Lt. Col. Richard Stephens, Jr., USAFR website: Rich Travel Niche

Oklahoma Military Heritage Foundation

Find out more about:

> Our yearly Military Hall of Fame Induction Banquet
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OKLAHOMA NEWS

Oklahoma National Guard Provides Helicopter Support for Arkansas Wildfire Response



Gov. Kevin Stitt has authorized the Oklahoma National Guard to provide a CH-47 Chinook helicopter and crew to support ongoing wildfire suppression efforts in Arkansas at the request of the Arkansas Forestry Division and Arkansas National Guard.

The Oklahoma National Guard's support is currently planned for four days and will provide additional aviation capability to assist Arkansas emergency responders in their firefighting efforts.

The deployment is being conducted through the Emergency Management Assistance Compact, or EMAC, an interstate mutual-aid agreement that allows states to provide personnel, equipment and other resources to one another during emergencies and disasters.

"Oklahoma stands ready to support our neighbors when they need assistance," said Maj. Gen. Thomas H. Mancino, adjutant general for Oklahoma. "Our Soldiers and Airmen are trained and prepared to respond when called upon, and we are proud to support Arkansas emergency responders during this effort."

While providing support to Arkansas, the Oklahoma National Guard remains in close coordination with the Oklahoma Department of Emergency Management and the Oklahoma Forestry Services. The Oklahoma National Guard remains prepared to provide support for ongoing wildland firefighting operations within Oklahoma as needed.

The Oklahoma National Guard will continue to coordinate with Arkansas officials throughout the mission and adjust support as needed based on the ongoing wildfire response. ● *Story and photo by MAJ Kayla L. Christopher, Plans Officer*

SPECIAL TO OKVN

THE COINS OKLAHOMA'S VETERANS CARRY, AND THE STORIES THAT GO WITH THEM



Most veterans have a few. A unit coin. One from a first sergeant or a chief. One pressed into a palm at Fort Sill or Tinker or Vance, at a change of command, at a retirement, or on the far side of a deployment. Some go back further, to a father or grandfather who came home from Korea or Vietnam with something in a pocket that meant more than its weight in brass.

Each one was given for a reason, and the reason is the part that matters. It is also the part that gets lost. The coin sits in a desk drawer or a shadow box for thirty years, and when the veteran passes, it goes to a son or a granddaughter who can read the crest but not the story.

AllCoin exists to write it down. A veteran, or a family member helping, photographs both sides of a coin they already own, adds a few lines about how it was earned, and it lives in a searchable Coin Library a grandchild can find decades from now. Uploading existing coins is always free for veterans.

To take part, go to allcoin.braav.co and create a free account; an email address is all that is required. Photograph the front and back of a coin in good light. Write the story: who gave it, when, where, and what it meant. Once your account is set up, you can also text a photo of a coin, with your account name, to **(805) 395-6805**. Then ask the veteran next to you at your post about theirs.

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Happy Birthday America 250 mural sponsored by the Ardmore Beautification Council and others, completed Sept 19th-photo by Drew Butler/The Ardmoreite.

Oklahoma Boasts New 250th Greeting Card Mural

Oklahoma's 300,000 veterans and all community members are invited to view the Ardmore Beautification Council's huge new 250th birthday greeting card mural, celebrating America's shared history and pride.

This massive mural on the back wall of the historic Turrentine Building honors America and its veterans and celebrates the 250th anniversary. It is located next to the train tracks on East Main Street in Ardmore, Oklahoma.

"I think that people who have defended our country deserve our best effort to honor them," muralist Bob Palmer said. "It was a privilege to be approached by the Ardmore Beautification Council and to get to design this as a lasting tribute to our nation's greatest concept - freedom.

The 290-foot-long and 60-foot-tall mural may be the largest greeting card mural honoring America's 250th anniversary. The Happy Birthday America Card cover begins on the left, and the bottom of the flag stretches almost three-fourths of the 290-foot wall to the sponsors section at the far right.

"The Heartland Flyer passenger trains that go through Ardmore allow people to join the community in honoring our rich legacy of defending democracy," Palmer said. "The community has a great view of the mural from the adjoining Depot Park.

The huge greeting card features portions of an American Flag and a bald eagle painted by master muralists from Oklahoma: Bob Palmer (Bethany), Joel Randell (Luther), and Shane Cox (OKC).

Retired UCO Art Professor Bob Palmer served as the project's lead muralist, historian and architect, anchoring its narrative. As founder of Palmer Studios and creator of thousands of murals, including Anadarko's "I Believe in Anadarko" and "Space Bison," he serves as a vital link to the community.

Palmer's former student, Joel Randell, is a nationally recognized sculptor known for bronze statues across the country, including the Bass Reeves monument. He applied his expertise to the patriotic greeting card segments on the mural's two-dimensional surface. His listing of the sponsors at the other end creates the illusion of a foldable greeting card.

In this trio, Shane Cox was entrusted with the hyper-realistic 50-foot-tall eagle with the most depth, with shading that makes the huge eagle figure appear to "fly" in front of the flag on the wall.

Painting a "huge wall next to train tracks" creates challenges with perspective and texture. For the most intricate assignment -the eagle -Cox supervised the scale and background elements. He decided how to bring the eagle alive against the massive, flowing stars and stripes of the flag and the atmospheric skies that tie Palmer's design and Randell's detail together.

Meanwhile, Palmer's guiding touch united all the design elements required for a wall of this magnitude. This obviously got the attention of engineers in freight trains, who would blow their signals in approval as they passed.

He excels at maintaining proportion on large surfaces, ensuring the mural appears accurate both up close and from a passing train.

"In the many environments I have painted in, this one will forever stand out in my memory because of the freedom we have enjoyed for 250 years," Palmer said. "It is neat how people are still excited to this day to celebrate it with a huge art project."

When record September heat delayed the project by a day, Kayla Kohort of Walters was enlisted to add celebratory fireworks near the traditional salute to the 250th anniversary on the greeting card's cover. Her artistry in the sponsor section strengthened the community's connection to this shared celebration.

Although the more than 100-degree days pushed the project to five days instead of four, the crew says Happy Birthday, America, and wants us all to enjoy many more years of freedom. ● *Story and photos by Darl DeVault, contributing editor*



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Sallisaw Veterans Home Hosts Open House



The Oklahoma Department of Veterans Affairs (ODVA) hosted a successful Open House and VetFest event on September 3rd to promote admissions to the Sallisaw Veterans Home. “We need the veteran community and their families to raise awareness about the Sallisaw Veterans Home, a flagship facility and hidden gem in a beautiful area of our state,” said James Bynum, Executive Director of ODVA.

Eagle Ops, along with other community stakeholders, held a special claims clinic onsite to assist veterans in accessing the care and benefits during the open house.

“Partnering with the Oklahoma Department of Veterans Affairs and the VA to help bring events like VetFest to communities across Oklahoma just makes sense for Eagle OPS. Our mission is about connecting relationships and resources to bring our heroes home, and this is exactly what that looks like in action. When we can help raise awareness, bring veterans through the door and connect them with the benefits and resources they’ve earned, everybody wins,” said Johnathon “Shep” Shepherd, Executive Director, Eagle OPS Foundation.

The event provided veterans with an opportunity to connect, tour the new facility, and meet with elected officials and ODVA staff. Senators Tom Woods and Warren Hamilton, along with Representatives Rick West, Melissa Provenzano, and Derrick Hildebrandt, attended to show their support for Oklahoma’s veteran community.

“When veterans get connected to the VA, their benefits and other trusted resources, it also opens the door to the many opportunities for social connection and community that exist across our state. From Eagle OPS Rally Points to events and programs hosted by other veteran-serving organizations, there are so many ways for Oklahoma veterans to get connected and stay connected,” said Shepherd.

In June, ODVA announced that Sallisaw Veterans Home was fully staffed, marking a significant milestone in expanding veteran care capacity across Oklahoma. To celebrate this achievement, ODVA initiated a statewide effort to admit sixty veterans within sixty days. Filling the long-term care beds within the Oklahoma Veterans Home System is vital to demonstrating ODVA’s commitment to supporting the needs of veterans.

“This facility serves as a valuable resource for veterans in Oklahoma, yet we also welcome residents from any state,” Bynum added. The home boasts unique amenities and is conveniently located near Muskogee, Tulsa, Fort Smith, Rogers, and Joplin.

ODVA is committed to improving the lives of veterans and their families at the Sallisaw Veterans Home in eastern Oklahoma. This modern facility spans 201,000 square feet on a 40.8-acre campus, offering 175 beds and employing approximately 275 staff members. The home features nine courtyards for therapy, relaxation, and dining, providing a safe environment that promotes wellness. Each veteran is provided with a spacious private room, a significant advantage over smaller veteran homes. Recently approved for admissions after passing its VA survey in April 2026, the home offers robust clinical services, and an excellent safety record.

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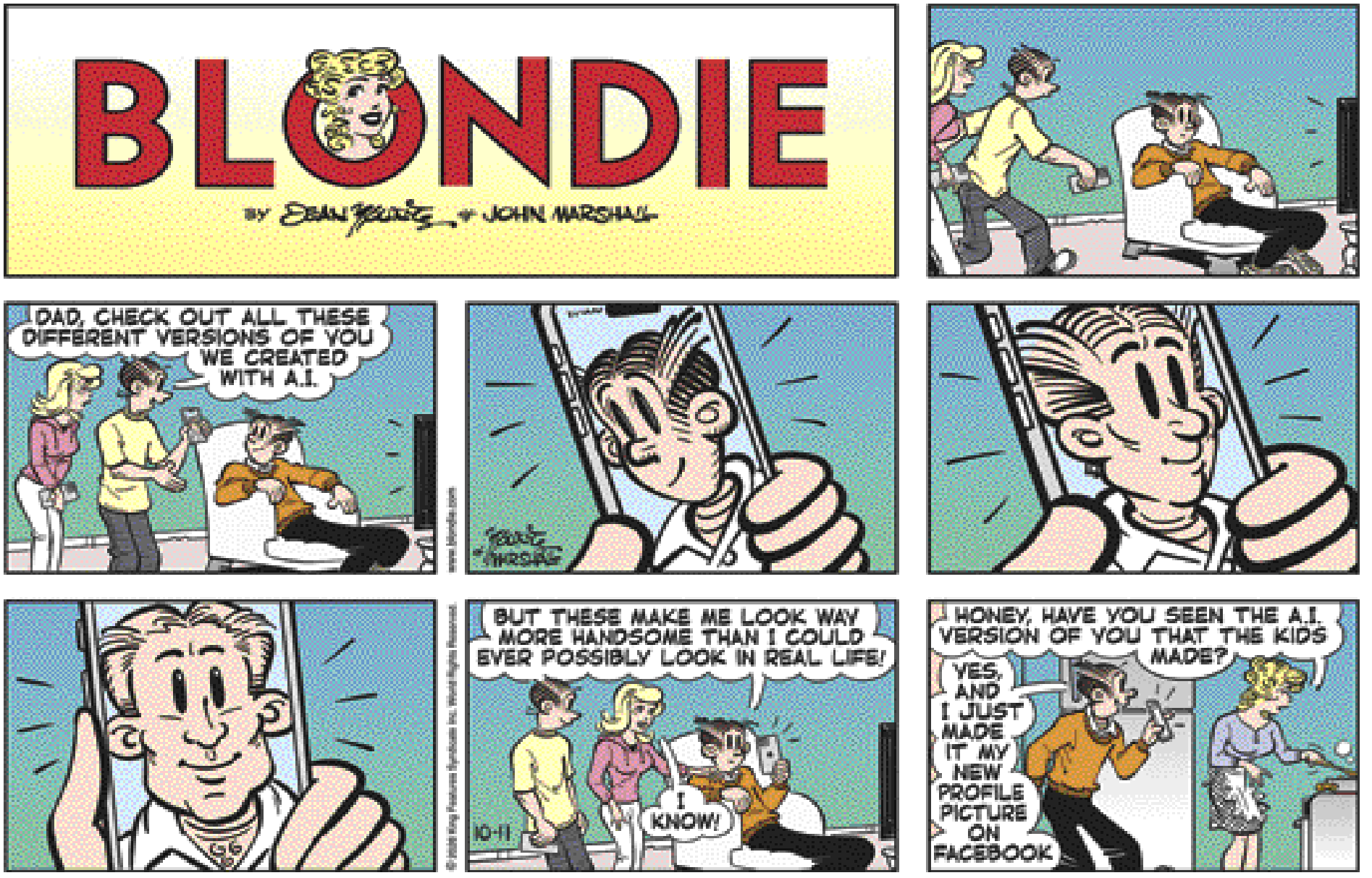
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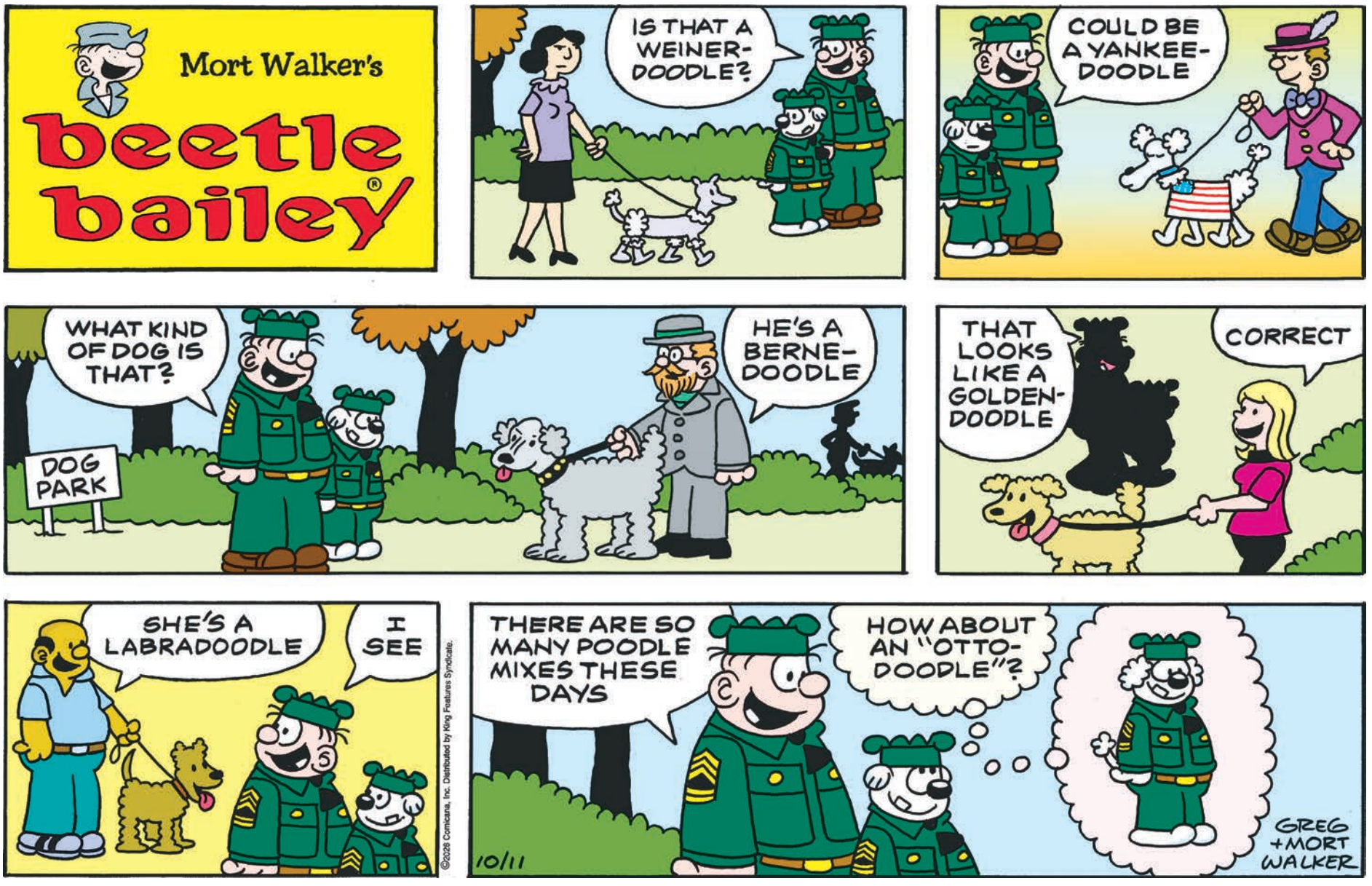
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O	Z	N	G	R	B	O	A	R	I	O	P	Q	G	I	B	B	X	I	W	K	T	G	Q
V	D	W	I	V	R	L	Q	P	I	W	D	U	I	J	C	O	H	D	U	P	N	H	H
U	H	P	Z	T	A	T	S	X	G	W	Q	M	A	L	A	R	I	M	D	A	E	C	L
R	W	A	E	G	T	X	E	P	J	N	Z	O	D	O	B	A	X	X	W	F	N	J	C
P	V	R	V	D	I	U	T	L	Y	I	C	H	X	G	B	D	F	E	A	B	I	N	E
A	V	W	K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

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