

AMERICAN LEGION

A PHOTOGRAPHIC EDITORIAL

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**To all the men and women who have served,
sacrificed, and come home to serve again.**

**“The question is not what you look at,
but what you see.”**

- Henry David Thoreau



While traveling through central Nebraska in 2013, I stopped in a small town to take photos of a grain elevator. An elderly gentleman mowing the lawn of an American Legion post rode over to me, said hello, and asked what I was doing. We chatted, and he invited me to stay in town for prime rib and dancing that night at the post, which was also the town's only restaurant open for dinner. He explained that service may be slow – local kids don't want to work at the restaurant and the older generation struggles to keep the post staffed. I reminisced about the American Legion post in my home town, which recently had been torn down. And so it began.

American Legion documents the lives of veterans who served our country and are now serving their community via The American Legion. This book combines my love of small town America with my unique sense of patriotism. This work will increase public awareness, recognize member service, and celebrate the veteran community.

Founded by Theodore Roosevelt Jr. at the conclusion of the first World War, The American Legion is the nation's largest wartime veterans service organization. In the last 20 years, however, Legion membership has dropped from 3.1 million to 2.4 million. World War II veterans, the largest and most loyal demographic of The American Legion, are dying at a rate of 640 a

day. With less than 1% of Americans currently serving in the armed forces, the decline of Legion membership has largely gone unnoticed in U.S. cities; small towns and rural areas have felt the impact more profoundly.

This project required more than beautiful and lasting images; it necessitated careful ethnographic documentation of our shared history as well as American veteran and small town culture. The resulting body of work honors our veterans' service and supports the continued success of The American Legion throughout the United States.

American Legion documents four posts in towns with populations of less than 1,000 across the U.S. between 2014 – 2016; members of IL Post 497, CA Post 801, VA Post 56, and NE Post 319 graciously accepted me into their homes and told me their stories. I traveled to each post for two to three weeks to collect in-depth perspectives and documentation, then followed up with additional visits or phone calls for writing and more photography.

Preface and Front Matter

The American Legion was chartered by Congress in 1919 as a patriotic veterans organization. Focusing on service to veterans, servicemembers, and communities, the Legion evolved from a group of war-weary veterans of World War I into one of the most influential nonprofit groups in the United States. Membership swiftly grew to over 1 million, and local posts sprang up across the country. Today, membership stands at roughly 2 million in 13,000 posts worldwide. The posts are organized into 55 departments: one each for the 50 states, along with the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, France, Mexico, and the Philippines. The American Legion is “Still Serving America.” Over the years, the Legion has influenced considerable social change in the U. S., won hundreds of benefits for veterans, and produced many important programs for children and youth.

Membership in The American Legion is open to all men and women who were in the Armed Forces of the United States during any of the following periods: April 6, 1917, to November 11, 1918; December 7, 1941, to December 31, 1946; June 25, 1950, to January 31, 1955; February 28, 1961, to May 7, 1975; August 24, 1982, to July 31, 1984; December 20, 1989, to January 31, 1990; August 2, 1990, to the cessation of current hostilities as determined by the Government of the United States.

Membership in the American Legion Auxiliary is open to the grandmothers, mothers, sisters, wives, and direct and adopted female descendants of members of The American Legion or any eligible deceased veteran.

Membership in the Sons of The American Legion is open to all male descendants, adopted sons, and stepsons of members of The American Legion or any eligible deceased veteran.

The American Legion is a non-partisan, non-profit organization.

National Organization Structure

National

National headquarters, has officers and staff

Department

State level, has officers and staff

Division

Grouping of posts within a geographical area, has officers

District

Grouping of posts within a geographical area, has officers

Terms for Legion family organizations

The American Legion

Post: Commander, Vice Commander, Adjutant, etc.

American Legion Auxiliary (ALA)

Unit: President, Vice President, Secretary, etc.

Sons of The American Legion (SAL)

Squadron: Commander, Vice Commander, Adjutant, etc.

Boys State and Girls State

Summer leadership and citizenship programs sponsored by The American Legion and the American Legion Auxiliary for high school juniors. Boys/Girls State is typically staffed by Legion members, past participants, and/or community leaders who volunteer their time and effort.

Poppy Program

Started in 1921 to raise community awareness and respect for veterans by sales of red crepe paper poppies. The poppies are handmade by veterans as part of therapeutic rehabilitation and are distributed in exchange for donations that go directly to assist disabled and hospitalized veterans. The poppy became a symbol of the sacrifice of lives in war and represents the hope that none have died in vain.

Often used terms

PUFL (Paid Up For Life)

Members pre-pay a lifetime of dues, the amount owed based on their age at payment.

DAV (Disabled American Veterans)

A nonprofit charity that provides support for veterans of all generations and their families.

VA (The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs)

The government-run military veteran benefit system with Cabinet-level status. President Obama’s 2017 Budget Request includes \$182.3 billion for the VA in 2017, which is expected to employ about 345,000 people.

DMZ (Demilitarized Zone)

In Korea, a highly militarized strip of land running across the Korean Peninsula, established at the end of the Korean War to serve as a buffer zone between the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (North Korea) and the Republic of Korea (South Korea). In Vietnam, a demilitarized zone was established as a dividing line between North and South Vietnam as a result of the First Indochina War.

Blue Star

Reference to having a family member in active military service.

VFW (The Veterans of Foreign Wars)

A nonprofit veterans service organization comprising eligible veterans and military service members from the active, guard, and reserve forces. Eligibility differs from The American Legion by requiring service in a war, campaign, or expedition on foreign soil or in hostile waters.

MOS (Military Occupational Specialty Code)

Used to identify a specific job.

Gold Star

Reference to having lost a family member in military service.

GI Bill

Considered the Legion’s single greatest legislative achievement. Signed into law in 1944, benefits include cash payments of low-cost mortgages; tuition and living expenses to attend high school, college, or vocational/technical school; and low-interest loans to start a business. One year of unemployment compensation is also included.

Current number of US veterans: 21,681,000 - data from VA 2015

POST 497 FRANKLIN GROVE, ILLINOIS



POPULATION 985





Franklin Grove was originally designated as the town of Chaplin in 1843; the railroad came through in 1851, and three years later it was renamed to honor the deceased son of ferry magnate John Dixon, who founded the neighboring town and county seat. In those early years, the easiest way to get from one settlement to another was by train. The first improved transcontinental highway in the U.S., the Lincoln Highway, was completed in 1925 and has played a role in the town ever since.

I drove into Franklin Grove and easily located the main street and business district, Elm Street, off of Highway 38, part of the original Lincoln Highway that stretches from New York to San Francisco. There is a library, bank, insurance agent, and cafe, along with the National Headquarters of the Lincoln Highway Association (LHA), a few vacant storefronts, and American Legion Altenberg Post 497. Outside of the post on a cork bulletin board is a sign that reads, "All Vets Welcome," and a list of current post officers and their phone numbers. I made a note for later calls. Looking for more information, I went inside where I met Lynn Asp, the manager of the LHA and wife of Post 497's Vice Commander Don Asp.

I traveled back and forth multiple times over the next two years, working with them to document their post, define this project, and

model the documentation of subsequent posts upon the results. As I began to speak with more veterans and residents of Franklin Grove, several reasons emerged to explain the decline in the town's population and membership at Post 497. There is no bar (the town has been "dry" for 40-50 years) and the interstate passes nearby without providing an exit. Furthermore, Franklin Grove's main industry is agriculture, whose profitability is highly dependent on weather, and with today's technology requires fewer workers to complete the yearly cycle from planting to harvest.

In the surrounding areas are a few places one can find work; there's a dry food packaging and dairy stabilizer company, a prison, and a nuclear power plant all within 30 miles, as well as the slightly larger towns of Dixon and Rochelle, which have some retail stores and other services. Enlisting in the military was, and still is, one of the few viable career options after high school.



William J. "Bill" Kirchhofer



Ivan J. Hullah



George "Ed" Edward Floto



Willard D. Simpson

previous page, from left to right

William J. "Bill" Kirchhofer

Born: 1925, Effingham, IL
Flight Officer, Army Air Corps
Enlisted: 10/1943 - 3/1946
Qualifications: Air Corps Cadet, Radar Bombardier
MOS: Bombardier
Prior to service: student
After: teacher, farmer, insurance and real estate broker
Joined The American Legion: 1954
Post position: Member
Previous: Commander, Finance Officer

George "Ed" Edward Floto

Born: 1936, Ogle County, IL
ET-2, U.S. Navy
Enlisted: 1954 - 1962
Qualifications: Class A Electronics School
MOS: Electronics Maintenance and Repair, USS Intrepid
Prior to service: farm boy
After: tv and appliance repair
Joined The American Legion: 1993
Post position: Adjutant

Ivan J. Hullah

Born: 1923, Dixon, IL
Corporal, U.S. Army
Inducted: 10/5/1944 - 8/9/1946, WWII European Theater
MOS: Heavy Weapons Squad, Rations Clerk
Prior to service: farmer
After: farmer
Joined The American Legion: 1963
Post position: Service Officer
Previous: Commander, Adjutant

Willard D. Simpson

Born: 1924, Fairfield, IL
T/5, Co. B, 103rd Combat Engineer Battalion, U.S. Army
Inducted: 12/1/1943 - 2/28/1946, WWII European Theater
Qualifications: MM Rifle
MOS: Tool-Room Keeper
Prior to service: farmer
After: farmer
Joined The American Legion: 1969
Post position: Member
Previous: Commander

Donald E. Asp

Born: 1941, Freeport, IL
Died: 2015, Franklin Grove, IL
Private, U.S. Army
Inducted: 1964 - 1970
MOS: Military Police
Prior to service: printer
After: printer
Joined The American Legion: 2008
Previous: Vice Commander





Delbert H. Schafer

Born: 1931, Lee County, IL
E-5 Sergeant, 3rd Army 9th Field Artillery Battalion 155, U.S. Army
Inducted: 8/1952 - 7/1954, Korean War
Qualifications: Wheeled Vehicle and Tank Mechanic
MOS: Motor Sergeant
Prior to service: farmer
After: farmer, implement dealer
Joined The American Legion: 1968
Post position: Chaplain
Previous: Commander

Dean Gendusa

Born: 1947
Specialist E-5, U.S. Army
Enlisted: 6/1965 - 6/1969, Vietnam War, Mideast Conflicts, Bush Wars in East Africa
Qualifications: Special Identification Operator
MOS: Military Intelligence
Prior to service: student
After: law enforcement
Joined The American Legion: 1987
Post position: Member
Previous: Commander





Robert Edward Logan

Born: 1953, Dixon, IL
Specialist E-5, U.S. Army
Enlisted: 2/18/1972 - 2/17-1975
Qualifications: Administration, Personnel, Intelligence
MOS: Personnel, Administration 71H / 75D
Prior to service: farm parts sales
After: Sears, mayor (5 term), tractor part sales, missionary pastor
Joined The American Legion: 1988
Post position: Senior Vice Commander
Previous: Commander, Junior Vice Commander



Joseph E. Loomis II

Born: 1967, Mendota, IL
E-4, U.S. Army
Enlisted: 1984 - 1992
MOS: Combat Engineer
Prior to service: student
After: McDonald's,
factory material handler
Joined TAL: 2009
Post position: Commander



Charles W. Grobe

Born: 1945, Dixon, IL
Airman, U.S. Air Force
Enlisted: 1965
Honorable Medical Discharge
Prior to service: nurse
After: nurse, truck driver
Joined TAL: 2004
Post position: Finance Officer



Amber Cooper

Born: 1999, Rockford, IL
Occupation: student
Started volunteering: 2012
Relationship to veteran:
granddaughter (Charlie Grobe)



Leslie Ballard

Born: 1956, LaGrange, IL
Occupation: retired
Started volunteering: 2014
Relationship to veteran:
friend (Charlie Grobe)



Chartered with 26 original members shortly after the end of World War I, American Legion Altenberg Post 497 was named in honor of local WWI veteran Harry Altenberg. Meetings were held upstairs at the National Headquarters of the Lincoln Highway Association until 1956, when the current meeting hall was donated to the post by Blanche Durkes, a WWI nurse – her late husband Luther was an original member of the post.

Donated funds from both living and deceased members have helped improve the building over the years. The post commissioned an exterior mural boasting the message “Freedom Is Not Free” in 2002 and a total remodeling of the interior in 2012.

While the post pays the first year’s dues for new members, this system has not been effective in keeping up membership. “Each war, veterans are less gung-ho about joining a veterans organization,” Bill Kirchhofer said. A few of the more active members said they would like to combine posts with nearby towns to enable more people to volunteer and participate at the few activities the post organizes throughout each year: Pancake and Whole Hog Sausage Breakfast, Memorial Day Parade, Boys State and Girls State sponsorships, Pork Chop Supper, and Veterans Day Dinner.

Steve Saatoff, a Vietnam veteran and bank president, donated monies in addition to his annual dues for the last several years of his life, creating a financial cushion for the post. Annual revenue is only about \$1500, generated mostly from meals. In 2014 the Pancake Breakfast was almost a complete bust due to poor turnout. In the spring of 2016 the post decided to sell the eight rifles they used for color guard, a process that took several months and yielded only \$3200.





When asked about the future of Post 497, active member Charlie Grobe replied, "I don't know. One day we aren't going to be there. In the last year and a half we lost four or five members." The small post looks to neighboring Dixon for funeral services, and members have considered merging with the nearby Ashton Post 345 but ultimately decided against it, fearing they would lose their identity and the history of members who were active in previous years. "Dixon has food and liquor at a large VFW, but in Franklin Grove even if they had one meal a week no one would come," Charlie laments. Most of the active members are over eighty years old, on disability, or past retirement age and still working. The post does have a few volunteers but no Legion family chapters. Paid membership for 2016 was 34.

Meetings are held the third Monday of each month at 7 pm. Each meeting begins with the group reciting the Pledge of Allegiance and Preamble to the Constitution of The American Legion. Memorabilia from Post 497's original members hang on the walls.



Every morning at 10am veterans gather for coffee and baked goods inside the National Headquarters of the Lincoln Highway Association (LHA). The building was owned by Delbert H. Schafer, who donated it in 1990 to the Farming Heritage organization, which works to preserve agriculture and history in the area. Farming Heritage then leased the space to the LHA.

"I didn't know what I was going to do with it," Delbert said. "I was just trying to save it." Concerned that the town would condemn the property, Delbert hired a mason from nearby Bishop Hill and went on with the building project. A mix of souvenirs, information, and related items of interest can be found in the front; the rear is filled with consignment items, including the town's locally made maple syrup, dolls, baskets, quilts, and numerous amounts of penny candy that draws in local youth.





Post 497 Vice Commander Donald Asp came from a military family. His father served in the Army in WWII and was wounded by shrapnel; his three uncles also enlisted. Don's own service began when he was drafted at the age of 23. Although Don wasn't opposed to serving his country, he said he felt lucky to serve stateside and not overseas. The most action he saw as an MP was directing traffic at LBJ's inauguration.

After his "retirement," Don worked as a truck driver during harvest season, spending up to twelve hours a day hauling corn to the local elevator. We arranged to meet while he was working – as I approached the combine loading corn into a truck, the air was filled with swirling corn dust, which Don lovingly referred to as "fairy dust" for the way it gleamed in the sunshine.

Shortly after, Don passed away. The cause of death was cardiac arrhythmia due to ischemic heart disease; at the LHA Headquarters, his wife Lynn wrote his autopsy results on a small piece of notebook paper which was circulated at the morning coffee conversation. Everyone took turns absorbing the news.





After basic training Dean Gendusa was sent to Vietnam. He was influenced to enlist by John Wayne films and his father, who served in Africa and Italy during WWII. He spoke only briefly of his tenure in the service, stating, "I wouldn't trade the experience even after seeing all the blood and death."

After his discharge Dean became a police officer. In 1986, he went with a few fellow veterans to see the movie *Platoon* and was appalled by the Hollywood glamorization of the war. Dean said the film got more than a few things wrong: he never saw people doing drugs, the guys only drank warm beer, and he never experienced any racial conflict – they were all there to work together. Dean and the other officers made such a commotion about the inaccuracy of the movie they were thrown out of the theater.

Dean may be an Army man but one of his sons is currently serving in the Marines. In 2014, just before his son graduated from basic training, Dean wrote a congratulatory graduation speech that ended with "now you are not only my son, you are also my brother."





Delbert Schafer proudly puts on his uniform for every parade and event, including the annual Memorial Day Parade, which he's participated in since he was old enough to walk. After being inducted into the Army in 1952, Delbert left his farming job and headed on a train to Breckenridge, KY. When he completed basic training he was sent to wheeled vehicle and tank mechanic school at Fort Knox where he graduated with the highest grades he'd ever earned. "I never took anything apart that worked," he joked. After traveling for two weeks on a ship to Korea, he landed at Inchon where they spent the first night in tents. The next night his group took a "busted out" train heading north in blackout conditions.

For the 40th anniversary of the war's end, Delbert travelled back to Korea on a sponsored trip for veterans and he was awarded a medal from the Korean government. He was surprised to see six-lane highways, hotels, and modern technology – it wasn't until he got close to the DMZ that the countryside began to look familiar. Delbert remembered that during the war farmers used stick and ox and cast-off military equipment to plant while working only a few miles south of the DMZ; on his return trip they had mechanized equipment.



Delbert was married in 1958, but he and his wife divorced after 30 years. "She thought the grass might be greener on the other side, but you have to mow that grass, too." He has three children and is the proud grandfather of eight.

He still has his grandfather's Rock Island tractor with steel wheels, and he recalls farming with horses. When he was six years old, neighbors called his parents and said "there's a tractor running through the fields with no one on it" – it was Delbert, too small to be seen. (He was able to drive it because tractors have a hand clutch instead of a foot clutch.)

Delbert is a self-described pack rat: "If you know how many tractors you have, you don't have enough." He has over 80, in addition to 10 cars and 25 trucks. "I can't throw things away. I'm too attached."

At 85 years old, Delbert is still working hard every day. The day before Thanksgiving of 2015, he fell off his combine and broke his right femur; after surgery and some time off to rest he went right back to work in his shop and fields.





On my visit to Willard and Maxine Simpson's home, Willard pulled out a scrapbook labeled "WWII Memories." Inside were several copies of his discharge papers, a poem titled "Gentleman from Hell" (about the legendary 28th Division in which he served as a replacement), a map of their route through Europe, and a brief handwritten account of his time in the Army. Willard doesn't normally talk about his service; however, after our meeting his daughter encouraged him to write something about his time in the military.

Willard is from a family of twelve kids – four of the nine boys went overseas in WWII, three in Europe, one in the Pacific. Willard and Maxine were neighbors in their hometown of Fairfield, IL. They went to the same church and were (and still are) sweethearts.

Willard was drafted at age 19 in December 1943, and the 16 weeks of winter training in Oregon were for him "a terrible place to train." His photos showed the snow-covered ground and soldiers in wool uniforms demonstrating how to lay mines, dig foxholes, and build bridges using pontoon boats. In early 1944, Maxine sent Willard a photo of herself at prom – he carried the photo across the Atlantic on the Queen Mary, then over the English Channel and all throughout Europe. Willard vividly remembers her wearing a flared dress and standing under

a trellis. She also mailed him photos of herself wearing a bathing suit; Maxine giggled as she recalled taking the photos with her cousin. The prom photo is now secured in an anniversary scrapbook compiled by their daughter.

After the transatlantic crossing in July 1944, Willard worked as a tool-keeper while his unit built bridges over rivers and cleared minefields so troops could safely cross in the cover of night. While at Camp Lucky Strike, Willard received a pass to see his brother Oren, a sergeant, from whom he was separated by a four-hour walk. When he arrived he sat on his brother's foot locker until he returned from duty – they were so happy to see each other.

Willard shared a story about his very last day in Germany: he was driving along in a truck picking up mines when the guy riding in the back yelled out "Sparks!" – one of the mines was sparking, which could have set off the others, potentially causing the truck to blow up. Willard thought, "What am I going to do?" He didn't want to lay down and get hit with shrapnel, so he ran 40 rods (about 200 yards) while the other guys laid down, which was what they were trained to do. He said that was the only time he was ever really scared because he had his papers to go back to his farm.

It turned out the sparks were just residual powder from a flare, and at that moment Willard knew he was going to make it home.

In the early fall of 1945, Willard rode out of Germany on a French ship back to the United States. He was home in Illinois for only 45 days before being sent to Massachusetts to work at a wounded soldier hospital. While at the hospital, he supervised and often played cards with three German POWs brought back to help work there.

After being discharged, Willard intentionally left his uniform in a store dressing room in Chicago while buying a new suit. Maxine's brother, who was in the city to sell eggs, went to meet him at Union Station; that same day Willard bought a car and drove home to Fairfield. He was officially discharged February 28, 1946 – Maxine kissed his discharge papers and they married a few months later. Maxine and Willard did some factory work before leaving Fairfield in 1948; they got into the hog business for five years before ending up farming in Franklin Grove.

While standing in their front vestibule, Willard and Maxine looked lovingly at a large photo of their family taken before two of their sons passed away. One of their sons was killed in a snowmobile accident in 2000; the other



passed in 2015 from pancreatic cancer. There are also two photos of them on their wedding day: Willard in a dark suit and round top hat, Maxine in a plain dress and belt with a huge corsage. Willard is still deeply in love with Maxine, who says, "I hope we're still here in two years to [see this book]."



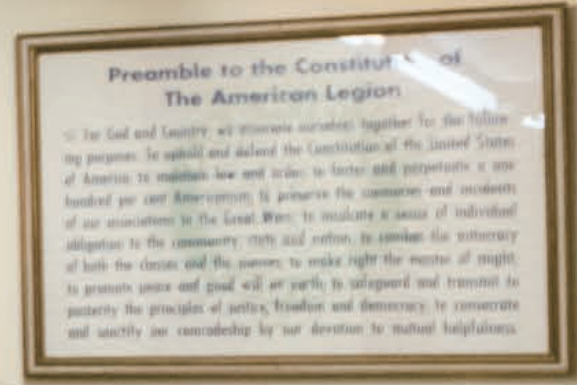


In the 1960s, Charlie Grobe was working as a nurse at the mental hospital in Dixon. Charlie's main ambition was to work in anesthesia, but he was broke and initially enlisted in the Navy seeking additional training and schooling. The Navy only had a job for him as a cook, so he declined and volunteered for the Air Force as a nurse. He only served for two months because the armed services refused to allow him active duty due to his childhood history of asthma. Despite his short service, the two months Charlie served were some of the proudest in his life. He's active in the community, belonging not only to The American Legion, but The Elks Club, Loyal Order of Moose, and 40/8 Honor Society as well.

Charlie married in 1966 and raised six children. His first wife passed away in 1996. Charlie's second wife, Diane, is the widow of his best friend who died around the same time as his first wife. His friendship with Diane turned to love, and they married in 2000; together they share 19 grandchildren. Charlie cares deeply for his two service dogs, who are a central part of his life, along with Diane, and teenage granddaughter Amber Cooper who has lived with him since his daughter passed away in 2012. Charlie notes that caring for a teenager is finan-

cially very difficult; both he and Diane are mobility-impaired and live on a fixed income of savings and Social Security, which "doesn't pay so great." Amber is currently completing high school, working at the Dixon Dairy Queen, and active in school sports – she also recently got her driver's license. She volunteers at Post 497 along with several of Charlie's other friends and relatives including Leslie Ballard, who helped him during recovery from hip surgery and attended meetings in his place.

In 2016, I stopped back to thank and visit with Charlie, who missed the Memorial Day festivities because he was recovering at the nursing home from a hip replacement re-do. We sat outside with his family, who brought along Sasha, his 95-pound "puppy." Charlie hated being in the nursing home; now recovered from surgery, he is glad to be home again. He especially missed cooking – his favorite American Legion activity is making turkey, gravy, and dressing for the Veterans Day dinner every year.





At 91 years old, Ivan Hullah continues to do his own landscaping. In the fall of 2015, while picking apples, he hurt his back and needed to start using a walker. Ivan lives alone in a large home; his wife passed away and he does not have children. He finds support from fellow veterans and the retired farming community, enjoying the daily coffee group at the LHA Headquarters in the mornings. "If I get my license taken away, they might as well just drive me straight to the cemetery."

Ivan married his wife Max (Maxine) in 1944, right after being drafted into WWII and before he had to report for duty in Chicago. Ivan's father didn't want to let him go to war because he was needed on the family farm.

While stationed in Germany, he was part of the 90th Infantry Division in a heavy weapons squad with three other men, operating a .30-caliber water-cooled machine gun. Ivan was the third man in line, tasked with carrying ammunition and water. When the war ended, the government developed a point system for demobilization based on service years, marriage, and awards; Ivan had few points as a newcomer and was promoted to corporal but had to stay behind. Eventually the infantry was deactivated and Ivan went into the 3rd Military Government Regiment. Its charge was to prove defeat over Germany with military presence as part of the occupying mission – "to let the Germans know

we beat them." Some of his fellow servicemen took the responsibility too far; he recalls one U.S. soldier making a German waitress butter his bread.

While in Germany, Ivan visited Bavaria, Burchess Garden, and the site of Hitler's hideout area, though he didn't want to go inside. He also saw the Autobahn, Hitler's special highway; Germans thought so much of it that they did not blow it up to stop the U.S. from advancing. Ivan agreed. "It was quite a highway." He was surprised Germany did little damage to stop American advancement, but said, "I never saw so much devastation as I saw in Munich." The sidewalks were full of debris from bombed houses, and the regiment's main task was cleaning up after the Battle of the Bulge. They took rations out to other towns and had German citizens do most of the work. Part of Ivan's duty was to stop German women from stealing rations. Overall, he says people seemed happy to work for the U.S. because they in turn received food.

When he came home to the Franklin Grove area, there was no room at the family farm, so he got a job with another farmer out of town. In 1950, Ivan and Max bought their house on Spring Street, right off of Highway 38. Max did all the home decorating, selecting wallpaper, carpets, and all aspects of home decor, most of which remain unchanged since her death in

2008. Ivan lived in the home alone until the end of 2015, when he hurt his back and was temporarily moved to the local assisted-living center. "It's not my back that's keeping me here," Ivan said at the time, "it's the year I was born." Life at the nursing home was difficult for him; he has a clear mind but his body is failing. On my last visit, Ivan was back at home; his niece Rosie checks on him daily and friends give him rides when needed.



Ed Floto's father was a farmer, but Ed joined the Navy at 17 because he did not want to continue in his father's footsteps. His two brothers served in the Army, and doing something different appealed to him.

Ed and his wife Larena were married while Ed was serving in the Navy. The couple owns several properties including a self service laundry, storage facility, and car wash. They have been married for 61 years and have three daughters and dozens of grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Ed was stationed for a year in the electronics department on the aircraft carrier Intrepid, the fourth U.S. ship to bear the name. He visited seven countries on the ship, crossing the equator and the Arctic Circle in the process. For the 50th anniversary of the Intrepid's commission, Ed and Larena traveled to New York City where the ship is now berthed on the Hudson River as the centerpiece of the Intrepid Sea, Air & Space Museum. They attended a reception and celebration; it was exciting for Ed to be back on the ship. He had the opportunity to explore the area where he worked and found the electronics department looked the same as it did when he served.





After the 2014 Veterans Day dinner, Anthony “Tony” Parks invited me to his home to talk and see his beloved radio collection. His home was easy to find, with a large sign right out front reading, “Tony’s Old Ladies Radio Museum.” He spent most of his life collecting and repairing radios and built the radio museum in a 2,000 square foot structure behind his home. His participation in the Legion stemmed from a museum visitor asking him to join the local post.

Tony had kind gray-blue eyes, short gray hair, a day-old beard, hearing aids, and oxygen tubes in his nose. His breathing was labored and he was hard of hearing. The noise of his oxygen machine, combined with some brain damage and regular seizures, made hearing difficult for him. Most of the conversation was between Madlyn, his wife of 39 years, and me. She called out loudly, “Isn’t that right, Tony?” or repeated loudly a question I asked, and then answered for him.

Tony was 69 years old and at the end of his life when I met him. He enlisted in the Navy on September 17, 1965 because he wanted to serve on the ground with his brother-in-law. He did Navy radar classification training for one year and served as an electronics radarman on the USS Preble (DDG-46). He spent a year and a half as a radio operator, working in the Rung Sat jungle along the Saigon River, using radar to

find submarines and aircraft, keeping the waters open for U.S. Forces. Tony recalled the time they found a 2’ x 12’ metal box, which ended up being a magnet mine that blew up nine vehicles and two commanders. He also told me they once found some Viet Cong towing a bomb to sink a merchant ship.

Tony was certain he was exposed to Agent Orange. The U.S. dropped the chemical to defoliate the jungle, and now most of the people that were in that part of the war are experiencing lung problems, prostate cancer, and other serious health issues. The effects hit Tony in his late 50s, and Madlyn said that by age 63 he was having really bad problems. “Should have taken LBJ over there,” Tony interjected. According to the VA, his seizures are attributable to childhood spinal meningitis. Tony believed the seizures were related to Agent Orange. Madlyn added, “The government doesn’t know what Agent Orange did, they are just guessing.”

Tony was turned down for benefits until Bill Kirchhofer contacted the Veterans Assistance Commission, which runs a van shuttling vets two hours west to Iowa City for treatment. Tony would have tried to use civilian medical care if Bill and other members of Post 497 hadn't stepped in. Madlyn stated, "Bill is a great man." They were worried because one local vet said he was told by the VA that he made too much money for help and that they won't let all vets enroll. At the time, Tony had some nerve problems. The seizures eventually put him out of work.

Due to his illness, Tony had not been able to go into his radio museum during the last two years; Madlyn helped him into the building so he could show me his radios. He cranked the record players he especially liked. We stopped and listened to the haunting melodies. He had so much pride in those radios. His breathing became labored, it was time to head into the house. Tony stubbornly cranked another record player and listened just a little bit longer before Madlyn shuffled him along.

Tony passed away on June 10, 2015. On his grave Madlyn had a photo of Tony as post commander engraved in the granite, along with a photo of his ship in Vietnam and four of their dogs.





Bill Kirchhofer enlisted in the Air Corps shortly after his 18th birthday, following four of his older brothers who were already serving. Anyone over 18 could enlist in the Air Corps cadet program, and after completing the program one could become a pilot, navigator, or bombardier. During WWII, 40,000 airmen were killed, and the risk for flying was high; navigator-bombardiers were the last members to be added to the Pacific Theater. Bill completed training as the war was ending so he was never sent to serve overseas. When he talks about his service, he reveals a sense of pride and honesty about never having fought or flown during the war.

He raised five sons with his late wife Ann, whom he met in high school and married in 1945 at an Air Force base in Florida. He keeps their wedding photo on his desk at the insurance office; he sold his insurance business in 2010 but continues to work there. One afternoon while I visited with Bill at the office, he and his coworkers sorted through a delivery of Lions Club flowers. He expressed concern for the future of fraternal organizations like The American Legion and Lions Club, fearing "people would rather sit at home and watch TV." Bill has many friends in the Legion. "It's been



very good for me personally because it has allowed me to affiliate with other veterans and contribute to the community." He has been commander several times, and he said that over the years it has become second nature. His favorite American Legion moment was receiving a 50-year certificate in 2004.



Bob Logan remembers in high school some of the local vets would come and talk to the students about serving in WWII. One of those vets, Henry Fruit, who served in WWI and was 102 when he died, was honored on his 100th birthday for his service and for his many donations to the Franklin Grove community. Bob was inspired by the patriotism and service of older veterans he met, and he enlisted in the Army in 1972.

Bob has a red mark on his left cheek from an M16 burn suffered during training; the shell ejected, bounced off a post, and got stuck behind his glasses. Bob served a three-year enlistment and spent three years on inactive reserve, most of that time while in the Defense Intelligence Agency.

Veterans have a lifetime commitment to community service, and as the former mayor of Franklin Grove, Bob appreciates the service of all veterans. "The values that sent us into service are the values that sustained the communities we built when we returned home."

Bob joined Post 497 in 1988, encouraged by member Milford "Mick" Cruse, a WWII veteran whose wife was Bob's teacher. Mick was generous and paid Bob's first-year dues before

dying shortly thereafter. Bob recalls that Mick would buy tractor parts even if he didn't need them to support their business, and that he was a father figure to local young men. Bob calmly explained that when working with a volunteer organization toward a common goal, "every project needs a driver. If you want to do something, get in the driver's seat." Bob is also one of very few people in Illinois to serve as village board president and school board president at the same time. His favorite American Legion moment was delivering the Memorial Day service address when he was mayor.









I was excited to visit Franklin Grove for Memorial Day in 2015. I had been to most of the town's other annual events and people said Memorial Day was their favorite. The Friday before, I received a phone call from Bob Logan saying that the State Representative who was supposed to give the ceremony speech would be unable to attend due to the budget strike and mandatory duties in Springfield. Bob asked if I would speak at the ceremony. I wasn't sure whether to accept; I felt my role in this project was observer, not participant. After considering, though, I eventually said yes, due to my commitment to the town and these individuals who had opened their homes and hearts to me.

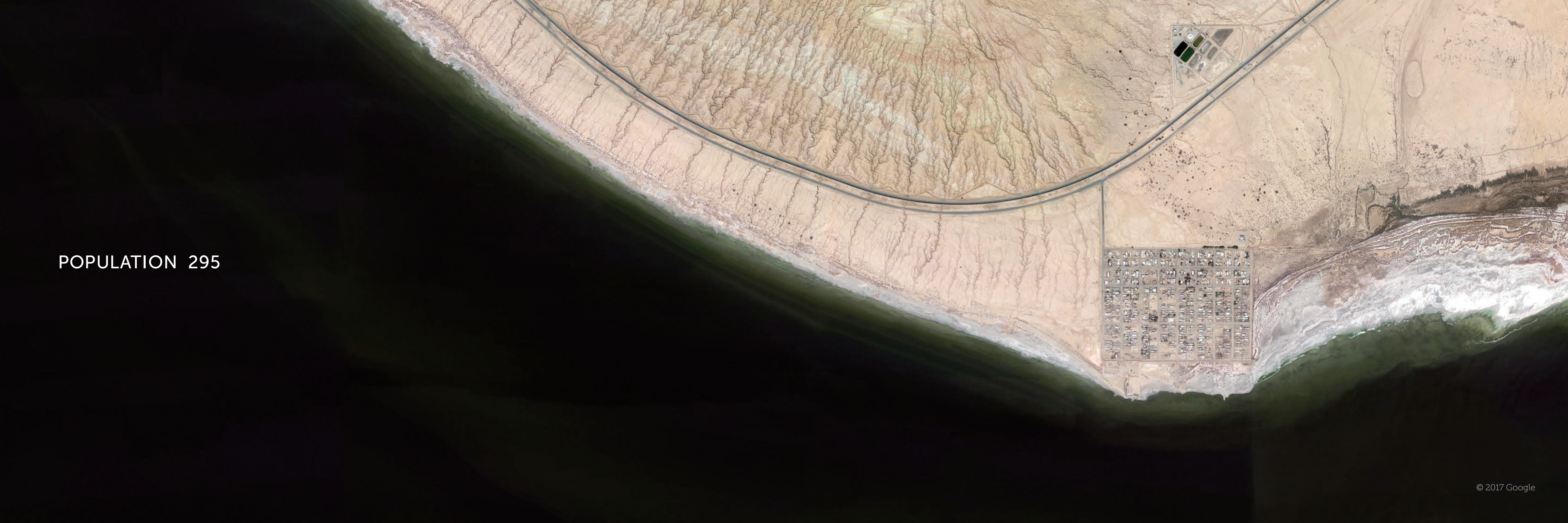
The flag set-up at the cemetery started at dawn. Six members, plus volunteers Amber Cooper and Leslie Ballard, put up over a hundred flags in the rainy, gray morning. Each flag represented a deceased member of the veteran community, some dating back to the Civil War. After the task was completed, Bill Kirchhofer took everyone out to breakfast at a small cafe in Ashton. We then parted ways to go home and get ready for the parade and ceremony later that morning. I went back to the Nachusa Grasslands' Bunkhouse, TNC's employee housing, where I'd been staying during my frequent trips to the area. I changed into the Post 497 T-shirt Charlie Grobe bought for me, and I headed back to town.

The clouds seemed to part as the parade began outside the Legion Post with seven members marching in the color guard including Bill, who was not sure if he was up for the walk while holding a rifle. They marched across the train tracks, turned on W Middle Street and paused at the War Memorial where a local student laid flowers as the color guard saluted. The parade continued a few more blocks, snaking into the cemetery, and everyone settled in folding chairs or stood in the shade to watch the memorial ceremony. Willard, not feeling up to the march, remained in the audience. Ivan stayed in his brother's car, parked close enough so he could watch out the window. Dean opened with remarks about the importance of Memorial Day, Delbert said a prayer, and I tearfully delivered my speech thanking the Post and community for welcoming me into their lives. The color guard fired their rifles, loaded with blanks, and the ceremony drew to a close. Afterwards, everyone returned to the post for an ice cream social. Later that day, I met up with everyone to help take down all the flags at the cemetery; they were loaded into the back of a pickup truck and brought back to the post. Everyone helped lay them out on the tables to dry after the damp morning. They would be folded later.

POST 801 BOMBAY BEACH, CALIFORNIA



POPULATION 295





I came across Bombay Beach, CA, while driving south on Highway 111 from Palm Springs; after spotting a small sign with an American Legion emblem, I drove slowly and eventually came to a fenced-off property at the northeast corner of town. Seeing the mysterious trailer configuration, surrounding town, and desertscape all backed by the Chocolate Mountains, I knew immediately this location would be ideal for the project.

The tiny town of Bombay Beach, with its abandoned motorhomes, trailers, and general disrepair, is one of the more surreal locations on the Salton Sea. It feels like walking through the set of a movie with a post-apocalyptic plot; in fact, the area is favored by photographers and film crews who come through daily to work on projects.

The terrain is tough and bare – a spot not far out of town was used as a bombing range and a military base where General Patton trained troops in desert warfare. The Salton Sea area was a popular tourist destination in the 1950s and '60s, teeming with boat launches, mobile homes, and weekenders from LA and San Diego who came out for fishing, boating, and partying along with the likes of Frank Sinatra and President Eisenhower.

In the 1970s and '80s, the community fell victim to rising lake levels due to higher than usual seasonal storms and agricultural wastewater dumped by nearby farms. The communities around the sea suffered devastating floods that destroyed blocks of property along the shoreline. An earthen berm was eventually constructed to prevent more flooding, and several blocks of town along the shore were left abandoned in the process. Today, aside from tourists and film crews, most residents of the town do not cross the berm, and in the several weeks I spent in the area I never saw a boat or anyone swimming.

Bombay Beach lives in the wake of the man-made natural disaster that formed the sea, and despite the presence of the film industry, extreme poverty plagues the community, with unemployment reaching as high as 25% in September, 2016. The overabundant flies are jokingly referred to as the “town birds,” and the residents ignore the smell of rotting fish in the hot, dusty air.



William C. Leslie



Dean McAfee



Chuck Hudson



Gerald "Rudy" Rudenick

previous page, from left to right

William C. Leslie

Born: 1967, Fontana, CA
E-5, U.S. Army
Enlisted: 2/1986 - 8/2001
Qualifications: EMT, Culinary Arts
MOS: Cook, Supply, Tanker, Scouts Mortars, Engineer
Prior to service: volunteer firefighter
After: fish farming
Joined The American Legion: 1989
Post position: Vice Commander, Acting Commander
Previous: Adjutant

Chuck Hudson

Born: 1944, Pewaukee, WI
E-5, U.S. Army
Enlisted: 1964 - 1967, Vietnam War, 1987 - 2000
Qualifications: Signal Corps
MOS: Communication
Prior to service: student
After: farmer, contractor, ranch management
Joined The American Legion: 2014
Post position: Member

Dean McAfee

Born: 1941, South San Gabriel, CA
E-4, U.S. Army
Inducted: 1964 - 1966, Vietnam War
MOS: Mechanic
Prior to service: pest control
After: pest control
Joined The American Legion: 1985
Post position: Member

Gerald "Rudy" Rudenick

Born: 1944, St. Peter, MN
MM2, U.S. Navy
Enlisted: 6/14/1962 - 6/14/1965, Vietnam War
Qualifications: Steam Jet Air Conditioning, 2nd Class Steam Engines
MOS: Steam Cooled Air Conditioning
Prior to service: high school
After: Southern California Gas Co.
Joined The American Legion: 1999
Post position: Member
Previous: Commander

Deno Morgan

Born: 1957, Portland, OR
E-6, U.S. Army
Enlisted: 8/1973 - 9/1975, Vietnam War
Qualifications: Ranger
MOS: Sniper
Prior to service: farmer
After: construction
Joined The American Legion: 1990
Post position: Member
Previous: Adjutant of CA SAL Squadron 132





Mark Smalley

Born: 1956, Toledo, OH
E-8 HTCS, U.S. Navy
Enlisted: 12/26/1973 - 2/1994
Qualifications: HT "A" Welding,
Firefighting, NBC Warfare
MOS: Teams, Navy SEAL
Prior to service: student
After: Pearson Packaging Systems



Terry L. (Rasmussen) Smalley

Born: 1960, Louisville, KY
E-5, U.S. Navy
Enlisted: 5/1984 - 5/1988
Qualifications: LCM6 Boats
MOS: Boat Driver, Color Guard Captain
Prior to service: farmer
After: health care





Bobby Blaine Jones

Born: 1991, Indio, CA

E-4, U.S. Army

Enlisted: 1/23/2012 - 11/26/2016, Afghanistan

MOS: 91 B Wheeled Vehicle Mechanic

Joined The American Legion: 2016

Prior to service: Pacific Aquafarms

After: student

Post Position: Member

Previous: Volunteer Cook and Waiter



Loretta Wine

Born: 1951, Los Angeles, CA

Occupation: retired

Joined ALA: 2009

Unit position: President

Previous: Vice President of

both Unit and District

Relation to veteran:

daughter, niece



Scheherazade Ane't Jones

Born: 1952, Pueblo, CO

Occupation: bartender

Joined ALA: 2007

Unit position: Treasurer

Previous: Bar Manager (Colorado),

Bartender, Volunteer

Relation to veteran: daughter,

granddaughter, niece, mother



Thelma Leslie

Born: 1971, Dallas TX

Occupation: retired

Joined ALA: 2014

Unit position: Member

Previous: Bar Manager 2006- 2016

Relation to veteran: daughter

(Aubrey Tarver), wife (William

Leslie), mother (Blaine Jones)



Sylvia McDowell

Born: 1957

Occupation:

Bar Manager, Post 801

Started volunteering: 2016

Post position: Bar Manager

Previous: Volunteer Bartender

Relation to veteran:

daughter and step daughter





American Legion Post 801 was originally chartered in 1979 with the name "Bombay Beach," and renamed in 1995 after deceased Post Adjutant Billie J. Dale. In 2016, the post had 36 members and the Auxiliary unit had 37. Most members are snowbirds who travel to the desert between November and March to escape cold weather elsewhere. The post building consists of several attached trailers that together form a large dining room, kitchen, bar, and outdoor space, all enclosed by a chain-link fence. Situated on a lot owned collectively by 60 townspeople and sometimes referred to as "Bombay North," the building is owned by the town's community center, which charges the post \$275 a month for rent.

Post 801 shut down for a few years because it was broke; for a while electricity was provided by generators and paid for by selling beer at the bar. The post owed money for back utilities and fell to disorganization and lack of member participation. Donations from members and the community over the years have kept the post going. Today, the bar is open to the public, run by volunteers, and overseen by a few active members that usually hang out there. A volunteer manager oversees day-to-day operations and works to keep the bar and kitchen open winter and summer. The most active members live in town year-round.







The Salton Sea is the largest lake in California and was formed by a man-made natural disaster. In 1905, levees broke below the California-Mexico border and diverted the flow of the Colorado River into the Salton Sink. The sea level is now controlled and fed by agricultural runoff, drainage systems, and surrounding rivers managed by the Imperial Irrigation District. The sink's surface sits 234 feet below sea level and varies in dimensions – about 15 by 35 miles – and spans two counties.

Over the years, water-level fluctuation caused flooding followed by droughts. In turn, massive fish and bird die-offs have occurred due to the escalating environmental harm of agricultural contamination and increased salinity. The future of the Salton Sea remains uncertain; it is predicted that if water ceases to flow into the lake and it continues to evaporate, toxic particulate matter that is currently submerged will become airborne. A sugarcube-sized piece of the sea bed contains 200 million particles of dust, pesticides and runoff, all of which will be released into the air via wind and dust storms. The increased air toxicity will affect the health and property values of residents and farm workers throughout Southern California.



Relocating elsewhere, however, is difficult for the many permanent residents who are poor or unemployed. Hospitalization rates for children with asthma in the county exceed national averages. There is no VA hospital in Imperial County and no emissions testing for vehicles.

A short distance outside of town is the Fountain of Youth Spa and RV Resort (FOY), "Where Snowbirds Have More Fun!" The FOY is a delightful mix of trailers, RVs and prefab homes, and residents must be retirement age or older. Built around a hot spring that now feeds mineral pools for rejuvenation, the FOY boasts a workout room, billiards hall, dance hall, swimming pools, and space for almost every recreation of interest to retired persons. The facilities are impressively clean, and everyone I interacted with during my stay glows with happiness and a coppery tan. Between April and November, the residents go back to their regular lives, meeting up again each winter for their version of Senior Citizen Summer Camp.

On Veterans Day a memorial service was held outside the cafe at the FOY, led by a VFW member who was accompanied by a bagpipe player. Everyone gathered in the hot midday sun, singing both "The Star Spangled Banner" and "O Canada." Canadians comprise about 50% of the winter residents and share the date as Remembrance Day. Several Post 801 members live at the FOY as snowbirds from November through April or year-round.





Robert Wayne Graham has been “Wacko” for about 25 years. His busted-up knuckles offer a window to the days when he was wild and would rather fight than do most other things, primarily “on account of the booze.” The name Wacko stuck, although today he doesn’t drink hard liquor and enjoys drinking beer only while out of the house. Wacko is now the town “cruiser”: he drives around in a golf cart picking up trash and checking in on residents at their homes. Over the years he has found a few of them dead.

Wacko was born in 1937 to English immigrants in Bisbee, AZ. His father was a copper mine supervisor and his family moved around, following the mines before settling in Long Beach in 1945. Wacko was drafted into the Navy in 1954 and left his job at Douglas Aircraft. In 1960, he completed his service and returned to Long Beach to work for General Telephone (now Verizon).



Wacko remembers a bustling Bombay Beach during the 1960s: "The town was packed even though there was no running water, no sewers, only outhouses." He was an avid fisherman and drove out from Long Beach every weekend, often staying until 2am when he would begin the five-hour drive back home "pickled."

He drank half-pints of liquor while driving, he recalled with a smile, and threw fish out the window at other cars before arriving home to shower and go right to work.

Wacko moved to Bombay Beach in 1979 after vacationing there consistently over the years; he began running a charter boat and leasing The Waterfront bar from its previous owner. The bar had large windows facing the sea so patrons could watch their poles and go out if they got a bite. Wacko ran the bar for seven years before the county forced him bring it up to code, resulting in \$25,000 in repairs. Later it was condemned after a flood, leading Wacko to sue the previous owner to recoup some of his costs. With the town in decline, Wacko went back to Long Beach for work and his wife stayed to run the bar and keep an eye on their home in town. After retiring, Wacko permanently relocated to his home in Bombay Beach and enjoys his days hanging out at the Ski Inn and Post 801.

Over the years, Wacko was married several times. He has 11 children and more grandchildren than he can count or remember. He joined the American Legion in 1980. "We earned it, we're entitled to it," he said. Wacko proudly served as commander for four terms.





Gerald "Rudy" Rudenick is a tall man who grew up in Minnesota farming beans, corn, wheat, cattle, and pigs. He had the opportunity to farm for his father but he was raised to be independent and decided to join the Navy along with his older brother. "There's more education in the Navy," Rudy explained. He was deployed on a WestPac Cruise on the USS Midway (CVA41), an aircraft carrier currently on display in San Diego. A former Commander of Post 801 for four years, Rudy's favorite Legion moment was when a local student wrote an original letter about why she loves the flag and read it at a Memorial Day service.

Rudy and his girlfriend of 20 years, Jean Smith, started coming to the area as snowbirds; each later bought a home in Bombay Beach. In 1999 Rudy retired and permanently moved there after winning \$20,000 at a casino. He had a bout with lymphatic cancer in 2011 and was clear for a bit, but now both he and Jean are at the end of their lives due to cancer. Over the course of six months he lost a considerable amount of weight but nevertheless made it to the post for the annual Chili Cook-Off, driving his 1927 hot rod decked out with plastic animal adornments.





Sylvia McDowell became the volunteer bar manager of Post 801 in April 2016. She previously volunteered as a bartender, and when Thelma Leslie decided to step down as manager after almost ten years, Sylvia stepped up. "These guys do a lot for us; it's an honor to give back, to do something in return." She'd been living an hour away in Palm Desert with her husband J.D. and working as department supervisor at a Home Depot, a job she continued for a year after moving to Bombay Beach. Taking on the responsibility of managing the volunteers while driving 80 miles round trip to buy food and supplies for the kitchen is a welcome challenge in retired life.

In her new position as manager, Sylvia plans to make improvements to the facilities and food selection. She has set up a small book exchange, added menu options, and deep-cleaned the kitchen and bar. "If things take off in the area then maybe younger people would join. The elderly come out for our fish fry; we need to do anything to bring in extra money."





Vietnam veteran John Gastol enlisted in the Army shortly after his 17th birthday, following in the footsteps of his father, who served in Bermuda during WWII. His two brothers also served in Vietnam and they have all experienced health and heart problems due to Agent Orange exposure. John is an advocate for increasing Legion membership, and he and his wife Linda, the current Unit 801 Vice President, have been active at both the Bombay Beach post and the post they joined first in Phoenix, AZ, where John served as commander.

John thinks The American Legion is important because it supports veterans, unlike the VA, which he says treats vets poorly. The Legion provides a supportive network for vets, something John finds comfort in due to the poor treatment he received as a vet returning from Vietnam; he remembers getting spit on and called a baby killer after landing at LAX in 1969. These days, John says, "The American Legion is a bunch of old farts," and he uses his previous career in marketing to help each post he belonged to communicate with non-members and promote the posts' community involvement.



Chuck Hudson went to high school in Milwaukee, WI. After graduation he couldn't find any work, so at 18 he enlisted. He had one brother in the Air Force and another in the Navy; he chose the Army. He thought he was deploying to Australia but ended up in Vietnam for over 11 months.

After serving, Chuck experienced rough financial and personal times. In 1987 he reenlisted in the National Guard Army Reserve desert training after struggling on his Nebraska farm and ranch. Health problems forced him into an early retirement and a divorce from his third wife left him broke. He piled his two dogs into his camper and towed it to Arizona to join his brother, a fellow Vietnam veteran. Chuck got a DUI and was eventually advised by his lawyer to leave the state.

He didn't go far, however, relocating to Slab City, a free campsite near an abandoned WWII base and active bombing range about ten miles from Bombay Beach. In 2013, he became the caretaker of the deserted "Shangri La" property (a popular party spot in the 1960s) and moved his trailer there. Chuck is shy, but enjoys playing the bass guitar at the post and at the annual "Blues After Dark" event. "I'm the entertainment" he joked, looking forward to playing during the winter months at the post. "There's nothing else to do."





Kimberly Branham, drawn to the beauty and quiet of the desert, has been coming to Bombay Beach for nine years. The community is really safe, she said, "like a dilapidated ghost town where everyone keeps an eye out." After buying a home there in 2015, Kim started working both at the post and Ski Inn as a fill-in bartender. She figured she could earn more elsewhere but would have to spend more money and time to do it.

"There are only about seven possible jobs in Bombay Beach, and I have had three of them," joked volunteer bartender Carol Schreivogel. She ran out of money in 2014 and ended up "getting stuck" in Bombay Beach. "The community takes care of each other," she said. "Even the people that don't like each other come together." She has been fired and rehired as a bartender at the post a few times, as have many of the volunteers.

Dean McAfee was drafted into the Army and sent to Vietnam. "My country wanted me so that's where I went." His father served in the Navy during WWII and was in the battle of Saipan. Describing himself as "not one who could sit," while in Vietnam Dean worked as a mechanic and wrecker driver, volunteered to build a mess hall, and then bartended at night.

Dean never saw combat but broke a toe when a truck fell on it. He avoided going to the field hospital until the colonel said he had to get his foot looked at. When speaking about this experience, he became emotional thinking about the other soldiers in the hospital. He started to cry during interview and excused himself from the room. The horrors of war stayed with him, as well as exposure to Agent Orange, which has caused some major health issues for him in recent years.

Dean has been coming to Bombay Beach since 1955 when his father bought a lot in town. He remembers there being no electricity or plumbing, only a sea of trailers and weekenders partying, fishing, and boating. He got into off-road buggy racing, working at races from 500-1000 miles long. His team was sponsored by Budweiser, and Dean worked in the pit crew in exchange for beer. He was once Ted Nugent's

mechanic in a buggy race, and worked as a mechanic with famed racer Tracy Valenta. Dean permanently moved with his wife to Bombay Beach in 2001 after retiring from a life-long career in the pest control industry.

An avid collector, Dean has amassed hundreds of Pez dispensers in recent years that are displayed prominently in the main room of his double-wide trailer, on shelves custom-built by post volunteer Aubrey Tarver. Dean has a dirty sense of humor and a light-hearted nature, and his near-constant stream of sexual jokes makes the other regulars at the bar laugh when he is around.

"Why wouldn't younger vets want to get involved? If it wasn't for the older vets, younger ones wouldn't have the benefits, hospitals, and other privileges we are entitled to," Dean insists. "Young people need to step up. Vietnam vets will never get respect – too many hippie-type people, they're the ones running the government. It's not 'what can we do for this country,' it's 'what can this country do for us?' Socialism is alive in the U.S." Throughout his life, Dean has played hard and drank hard, all the while working hard for what he has earned.





Black cloth covered a wall plaque in the dining room of Post 801 when Auxiliary member Helen Contreras passed away after a long battle with cancer. Her memorial service, open to the entire community, included those not welcome at the bar due to previous indiscretions of varying degrees.

Memorials at the Legion are a favorite event for many of the people in town; they allow everyone to come together and celebrate the life of someone who was important to them and to the small community. Ladies gathered around Helen's photo, placed near her regular spot at the bar (often referred to as "Bitches' Corner"); her ashes sat on a table surrounded by a few full bottles of Bud Light and photos of her having fun at the Legion over the years. Helen loved the song "New York, New York," and when it was played on the jukebox people danced and put their legs up on the bar and pool table, just like Helen used to. Rounds of drinks were bought for her husband, Gil, and their children and family came into town for a potluck lunch and to sing, dance, and party into the night. Helen's niece, Loretta Wine, became Unit 801 President in 2016; Loretta cried, wishing Helen would have been alive to see her as unit president.







Bill Leslie grew up in nearby Calipatria and enlisted at 18; he missed his high school graduation to join the Army. He stayed in the military for almost 16 years and was up for promotion to staff sergeant but lost out to a younger enlisted man. He got out right before Desert Storm. For 21 years Bill worked at Pacific Aquafarms, located near the spas outside of town and fed by the natural spring water.

He and his entire family in Bombay Beach volunteer at the post. His wife, Thelma, was the bar manager for almost ten years and all their children volunteered at the post after school and on weekends, working in the kitchen or as servers. Their oldest son Blaine joined the Army and did a tour in Afghanistan, then joined the post immediately upon returning home. Thelma's father, Aubrey, is the post's maintenance man, who remodels and paints the building as needed; her brother "Buckshot" (Aubrey Jr.) was a longtime bartender. It is difficult for Bill to balance his full-time job and the responsibilities of helping run the post; he tries to get younger members to join by talking to them and explaining what the post does for the community. "Members need to step up. We have a lot of ghost members."





Mike Walker was born in 1949 in Detroit and grew up on a ranch in Colorado before moving to California at 15 to live with relatives and establish residency for college. Mike was drafted into the Army in 1969 and served overseas in Vietnam. "That was a fiasco. To this day, I don't know why we were there." Mike flew in helicopters for a while, but after realizing the dangers of flying he joined the infantry. He lived in a bunker for six months, mostly underground. He was hit with a mortar at one point and a medic pulled shrapnel out of his leg.

When Mike returned home, his sergeant told him to take off his uniform if he went into a restaurant: "don't punch anyone who gives you a hard time; try to keep the peace." His father served in the Navy in WWII and took him to a VFW post when he came home. "They said 'we don't want you here.' It was kinda a slap in the face when I got back home." In addition to the negativity he found directed toward returning soldiers, his previous employer would not give him his job back. Mike waited five months, and then received VA help – the only time he used their services. Eventually he got his job back along with five months' pay, plus a test for Agent Orange exposure.





Mark Smalley joined the Navy six months shy of his 18th birthday with his mom's signature. His parents were divorced and he needed something better, so he left the day after Christmas 1973, halfway through his senior year.

Terry Smalley grew up on a tobacco farm in Kentucky; at 24 she was a single mom and joined the Navy. They met after frequenting the same bars near their base – Mark had seen Terry on the all-female color guard and had a crush on her. She was the first certified female driver of an LCM6 and is proud of it. "I did a lot of female crap when they said you couldn't." Mark and Terry married in 1988 and Mark stayed in the Navy until 1994, serving as a SEAL. "The Navy was good to both of us," Terry explained.

The Smalleys spend their summers in Spokane, WA, and their winters at the Fountain of Youth where they both work at the security gate and pass the time enjoying all the activities the resort and desert have to offer. They have not yet joined Post 801, saying they will when they have more time to dedicate as active members. Until then, they will continue visiting Bombay Beach and drinking beer with friends at the post.



The women who serve as Auxiliary members are a driving force behind the continued success of Post 801. They volunteer at the post, cook a free breakfast for all vets in the community on Veterans Day, and work at the annual Chili Cook-Off, which helps raise money to send a student to Girls State. Unit President Loretta Wine sews quilts that are used as prizes for "opportunity drawings." (California has strict gambling laws and prohibits raffles.) Loretta's artistic talents won first place at a district convention one year – she created a flag out of poppies, which is now framed and hanging at the post. When a local vet from the community needs assistance or money, the Auxiliary helps out however it can. One year, the Auxiliary packed 500 combs and decks of cards as stocking stuffers and drove them to the nearest VA hospital, which is several hours round trip from Bombay Beach.

Several women expressed the need for their friends and partners who served in Vietnam to open up more, to talk about their experiences and start to heal; they see the trauma war has caused and want them to find peace. Until then, Auxiliary members will continue supporting vets at every possible opportunity.





Scheherazade Jones comes from a military family – her father is a disabled vet, her brothers both served, and her son, Dustin, lost his leg serving in Afghanistan. She is not sure how he was injured (he will not share the details) but his family has supported him through it all. Scheherazade was proud to be with him on both occasions when he took his first steps, once as a baby and again with his prosthetic. Dustin worked as a topographical engineer and after his accident he stayed in, saying “they don’t use my leg, they use my brain.” Dustin ended his career as master sergeant.

Scheherazade has volunteered at the post for eight years and is an Auxiliary member. Previously, she lived in Colorado and managed a Legion post bar there for about 15 years. Currently, she bartends at the Ski Inn, the town’s other bar and restaurant, where she actively promotes the sale of “Fish Assholes” – the proceeds go to Bombay Beach’s volunteer fire department. On the holidays, she enjoys sending goodie bags and writing Christmas cards to vets overseas to keep up their morale. Scheherazade said if she wins the lottery, she will make sure there are no more homeless veterans, a cause that she supports every chance she gets.





The people who stay in Bombay Beach love to have fun and party. Around town, the "Bombay Beach Salute" is the middle finger, and a constant, light-hearted ribbing of neighbors prevails. Small communities often have minor disagreements among their inhabitants, but they're usually brought back together in the face of adversity. In the six months between my visits to Bombay Beach, there were some disagreements about volunteer staff, and Wacko stepped down as commander right before my return.

In the week that followed, I saw Wacko at his regular spot at the Ski Inn but he declined to come into the post, not even for the Veterans Day breakfast or the Chili Cook-Off. I didn't see him at the Blues After Dark party, held in honor of Loyd Diggers, who was at the tail end of a battle with cancer and one of the few remaining "original" party people in town. Wacko seemed to have shrunk in size, the pride of commander stripped from his identity, part of his daily routine and purpose gone.

On the last day of my trip, I arranged for Wacko to come to the post and have his portrait taken privately. Sylvia unlocked the gate and door and allowed me to photograph a few remaining veterans who wanted to participate

in the project; Wacko was scheduled in at the end. While I was taking pictures, a representative from the electric company unexpectedly came in and said they had detected a problem with the post's electrical service at their office; he would need to shut it down. The technician gave me five more minutes, but he soon discovered that the main panel needed to be replaced to avoid a serious electrical fire. Wacko was called, his number still on file as the post's emergency contact; he was out shopping at the Wal-Mart but rushed back to town and worked with other members to hire an electrician to install a new panel as soon as possible.

POST 56 CHERITON, VIRGINIA



POPULATION 477





Only an hour outside of Norfolk and across the Chesapeake Bay Bridge-Tunnel (CBBT) is the town of Cheriton, home of American Legion Northampton Post 56. A sign at the entrance to town reads "Cheriton – Small Town, Big Heart." A few miles away sits the larger community of Cape Charles with its restaurants, shops, and grocery store. Cheriton and Cape Charles occupy the Eastern Shore area of Virginia, at the southern tip of the Delmarva Peninsula. The Shore, as locals call it, comprises sparsely populated communities surrounded by farmland, bordered by the Chesapeake Bay to the west and the Atlantic Ocean to the east. Major industries on the Eastern Shore are agriculture and aquaculture, and approximately 20% of residents fall below the federal poverty line.

Cheriton is accessible driving south from the mainland, by ferry or boat, or driving 40 miles north from Virginia Beach across the CBBT. The \$13 one-way toll deters both frequent traffic and expansion of nearby cities. I first found my way there on the Internet, coming across the Post 56 Facebook page, and then an online article in the *Cape Charles Wave* by former Post 56 Commander Joe Vaccaro. Seeing the painted image of a huge American flag wrapped around the corner of a blue and tan brick building confirmed for me that this would be the next location for *American Legion*. I had found posts "from sea to shining sea."

When I called to arrange my visit, Commander Bill Stramm was excited about the project and offered a warm invitation. "You coming here is a feather in our cap," he said, assuring me that post members would be happy to participate. A current member of the Cape Charles town planning commission, Bill moved to the area with his wife when he retired to enjoy the prestigious Nicklaus and Palmer courses at the Bay Creek Resort and Club, but he has less time for golf than he expected. "I work more now than when I was working for a living. All the volunteering is getting in the way of my golf playing," he joked.

Thanks to the diligence and community spirit of its members, the profile of Post 56 among veterans in the region has increased, aptly demonstrating The American Legion's purpose in the community – promoting patriotism and goodwill. Townspeople and veterans alike praise the community service of Post 56, which includes blood drives, the hosting of Lions Club meetings, and program sponsorship of other charitable organizations like Freedom Hunters that assist veterans.



Joe Vaccaro



William R. Stramm



Wilson T. Leggett, Jr.



James R. Chapman

previous page, from left to right

Joe Vaccaro

Born: 1951, New York
Colonel, U.S. Marine Corps
Enlisted: 1974 - 2005, Operation Desert Storm, Operation Iraqi Freedom, Operation Enduring Freedom
Prior to service: police officer
After: police officer
Joined The American Legion: 1981
Post position: Department Judge Advocate
Previous: Commander, Vice Commander

William R. Stramm

Born: 1949 Fukuoka, Japan
O5, U.S. Army
Enlisted: 9/28/70 - 8/31/92
Qualifications: CGSC, Airborne, Ranger, Pathfinder
MOS: Armor and Acquisition
Prior to service: student
After: defense contractor
Joined The American Legion: 1992
Post position: Commander, Service Officer
Previous: 1st Vice Commander, Finance Officer, Department Vice Commander

Wilson T. Leggett Jr.

Born: 1943, Franklin, VA
SPF-4, U.S. Army
Inducted: 6/2/1965 - 6/1/1967
Qualifications: CGSC, Airborne, Ranger, Pathfinder
MOS: 82C20 Artillery Survey
Prior to service: sales
After: finance
Joined The American Legion: 1992
Post position: Chaplain
Previous: Vice Commander, Trustee

James R. Chapman

Born: 1946, Cairnbrook, PA
E-7, USAF
Enlisted: 11/1964 - 11/1985, Cuba
MOS: Aircraft Control and Warning
Prior to service: student
After: law enforcement, construction
Joined The American Legion: 1991
Post position: Member
Previous: Commander, Adjutant, Finance Officer, Chair of Building Committee, Department Commander



Jill Combs

Born: 1962, Honolulu, HI
Occupation: DMV Manager
Date joined ALA: 2009
Unit position: President
Previous: Secretary
Relation to veteran: daughter



Kendall Combs

Born: 1992, Virginia Beach, VA
Occupation: agency assistant
Date joined ALA: 2014
Unit position: Historian
Relation to veteran: granddaughter



Anna "Hania" Steward

Born: 1959, Wroclaw, Poland
Occupation: housewife, caregiver
Date joined ALA: 2013
Unit position: Bartender
Relation to veteran: wife (Dave Steward)



Susan A. Moyers

Born: 1966, Harrisonburg, VA
Date joined ALA: 2007
Unit position: 2nd Vice President
Previous: Chaplain, President
Relation to veteran: daughter



Harold Bruce Arnold

Born: 1942, Tacoma, WA
E-5 GMG, U.S. Navy
Enlisted: 10/1962 - 10/1966
MOS: 5" Guns, 5th Division 2 Forward Guns
Prior to service: student
After: NOAA
Joined TAL: 1997
Post position: Member
Previous: Commander

Glenn Purvis

Born: 1948, Richmond, VA
Chief E-7, U.S. Navy
Enlisted: 10/1968 - 10/1988
Qualifications: Cryptologist, Electronics
MOS: Cryptologic Technician
Prior to service: student
After: DOD Engineer
Joined TAL: 2014
Post Position: 1st Vice Commander
Previous: Historian

Dave Steward

Born: 1946, Norfolk, VA
E-5 SK2, U.S. Navy
Enlisted: 7/1967 - 7/1973
Qualifications: Supply School, Cold Weather Training
MOS: Storekeeper
Prior to service: student
After: marketing
Joined TAL: 2009
Post position: Member, Trustee
Previous: Commander, Finance Officer

John "Jake" Hoinski

Born: 1942, Jefferson, NY
E-4, U.S. Air Force
Enlisted: 3/1961 - 2/1965, Cuba
Qualifications: Missile Maintenance, Launch Crew
MOS: Missile Maintenance Tech, Elec. Production, Code Decipher
Prior to service: school
After: lumber yard, stair builder
Joined TAL: 1990
Post position: Member
Previous: Finance Officer, Assistant Adjutant

Charles T. Etz

Born: 1939, Nassawadox, VA
SFC E-7, U.S. Army
Enlisted: 1961 - 1996
Qualifications: Advanced NCO Academy
MOS: Analyst, Recruiter, BU Personnel Sgt.
Prior to service: student
After: sales
Joined TAL: 1975
Post position: Member
Previous: Service Officer, District Service Officer

Larry Edward McCluskey

Born: 1947, Hawthorne, CA
E-5, U.S. Navy
Enlisted: 6/1965 - 6/1972, Vietnam
Qualifications: U.S. Naval Nuclear Power School
MOS: Nuclear Electrician
Prior to service: student
After: electrical contractor
Joined TAL: 1969
Post position: 2nd Vice Commander

Michael C. Jordan

Born: 1954, Baltimore, MD
FC6 / PO1 E-6, U.S. Navy
Enlisted: 1/1974 - 11/1995, Reservist 6/79 - 6/81, Med Cruise, Egypt
Qualifications: Radioman "A" School, Personnelman "A" School
MOS: Aircrew VQ4, USS J.F. Kennedy
Prior to service: student
After: professor
Joined TAL: 1986
Post position: Member

David Krough

Born: 1955, Penns Grove, NJ
SFC, U.S. Army
Enlisted: 11/1972 - 7/1993
MOS: 98J Non-Communications Intercept Supervisor
Prior to service: student
After: technical trainer
Joined TAL: 1995
Post position: Adjutant



Johnny L. "JC" Carstens

Born: 1960, Nassawadox, VA
E-4, U.S. Navy
Enlisted: 9/1980 - 9/1984
MOS: Aviation Ordnance
Prior to service: lifeguard, teacher's aide
After: CBBT Police Officer, CBBT Corporal
Joined TAL: 2006
Post position: Sergeant-At-Arms

Leonard Hadel

Born: 1952, Silver Spring, MD
SP4, U.S. Army
Enlisted: 1969
Qualifications: 51-B-20
Construction Engineering
MOS: Security Police
Prior to service: carpenter
After: CSX Railroad
Joined TAL: 1973
Post position: Volunteer Bar Manager, Member

William O'Hare

Born: 1946, Flint, MI
SP4, U.S. Army
Inducted: 5/1966 - 3/1968
Qualifications: Military Police
MOS: Military Police
Prior to service: student
After: student, statistician
Joined TAL: 2008
Post position: Member

Daniel Thoele

Born: 1964, Chicago, IL
O-5 / LTCOL U.S. Marine Corps
Enlisted: 8/26/1982 - 9/1/2013,
Desert Shield, Desert Storm, OIF, OEF
Qualifications: U.S. Naval Academy, Amphibious Warfare School,
Command and Staff College
MOS: Infantry Officer
Prior to service: busboy
After: defense contractor
Joined TAL: 2012
Post position: Member

Barry Taylor

Born: 1943, Norfolk, VA
E-4, U.S. Air Force
Enlisted: 8/1962 - 8/1966
MOS: K-9 Air Police
Prior to service: student
After: CBBT Police Officer, Bay Creek Security Officer
Joined TAL: 2013
Post position: Vice Commander, Executive Committee

Rex Ingram

Born: 1927, Houston, TX
E-7, U.S. Navy
Enlisted: 12/1/1944 - 9/9/1966,
WWII, Korean War, Vietnam War
Qualifications: Marine Combat Training, Field Medical and Trauma Training
MOS: Naval Medic to Marines, 5th Marine Regiment
Prior to service: student
After: educator
Joined TAL: 2011
Post position: Member

Samantha Jette

Born: 1990, Columbia, MD
LT, U.S. Army
Enlisted: 5/26/2016 - current
Qualifications: Officer Development School, Combat Casualty Care Course
MOS: Dentist / Doctor of Dental Surgery
Prior to service: student
After: dentist
Joined TAL: 2015
Post position: Member

Anthony Jette

Born: 1988, Millington, TN
O-2, U.S. Army
Enlisted: 4/2007 - current
Qualifications: Army ROTC, Army Airborne, Army Flight School, Army SERE School
MOS: 15A Pilot
Prior to service: student
After: police officer
Joined TAL: 2015
Post position: Finance Officer







American Legion Northampton Post 56, one of the oldest in the country, was chartered in 1922 in Cape Charles. In the 1980s and '90s, the post met in various temporary buildings around the Shore, including one in Cape Charles owned by the Ford Motor Company. Members had not enjoyed a place of their own since the 1950s, when the former post burned down.

In 2005, Joe Vaccaro went to a post meeting at the Ford building and saw only five or six people there. Shortly thereafter, the Ford building's owner donated the property to the post, which in turn sold it and used the proceeds to purchase the current location, a recently closed supermarket in Cheriton. The food still on shelves was donated to people in the community, and the old coolers and equipment were sold. Several members stepped up and donated money and time for the remodel. Another member, Herb Konrad, who is now deceased, wrote a check for \$5,000 to make improvements. "Even if you don't have time, you make time," member Bill Burton said. "Here, everyone is thankful. We are high on gratitude."

Jim Chapman and his sons handled most of the labor for the remodel; they came in at night and Joe and Bill Burton emptied the contents during the day. Post 56 held its first meeting on

its charter anniversary in 2006; members celebrated with sandwiches, the party lit by a single lightbulb in the half-remodeled store.

The new post was completed in May 2007, and at the grand opening Marine four-star General James Mattis spoke of duty and obligation; it was one of the post's proudest moments. His thoughts resonated with the local vets, who had dedicated time, resources, and sweat to complete the renovation. The bar was officially open to Legion and Legion Family members only – to enter one must be buzzed in or have an electronic key code; non-member visitors must be signed in by a member.

Over the last decade, membership has risen from an all-time low of 22 to over 240, and Post 56 has earned a remarkable collection of honors, including highest state membership, Commander of the Year, Law Enforcement Officer of the Year, and Legionnaire of the Year. The post has thriving Boys and Girls State programs, a Law Enforcement Junior Cadet Program, and an Oratorical Contest. In 2016, Post 56 membership was 245; the post's Auxiliary Unit had 43 members and its SAL Squadron 60 members.



An avid area fisherman for a decade, Leonard Hadel moved to Cheriton in 2011. He found a home on the small downtown strip, right across the street from the Post 56 building. Leonard is a prankster with a dirty sense of humor, and people at the Legion bar jokingly warn that “everything out of his mouth is bullshit.” He often buys rubber rodents and insects and hides them in people’s vehicles or sends them in the mail to friends. While in Cheriton, I found several rats and snakes outside my car in the evenings when leaving the post. “You know, there’s been a real snake problem around here lately,” Leonard said one morning.

Leonard is the current volunteer bar manager at Post 56. He spends several hours each day making sure bar shifts are covered and things are running smoothly. As a regular bartender, Leonard chats with members and occasionally “sneaks” a shot – the premises have a surveillance system and he sometimes covers his face from the camera as he takes a sip.





Aquaculture and fishing are main industries in the area, and many members of Post 56 earn their livelihood from the sea and bay. Regulations on fishing and harvesting have had a significant impact on the area. These regulations, although frustrating for some watermen, ultimately aim to provide sustainable seafood for current customers and jobs for future generations in the industry. I was invited to tour member Bernie Rolley's conch processing facility during my visit. A handful of employees were hitting the machine-cracked shells with metal rods, then pulling out the creatures and putting them in a bucket to be washed, packed, and frozen.

Auxiliary member Susan Miller runs Clams Direct, a family-owned clam farm her parents started in 1987. The clams begin their lives being fed pasteurized algae in indoor tanks; then clam 'seedlings' are planted into beds of crushed shells in the Chesapeake Bay and covered with nets to protect them from predators like crabs and birds. When they reach maturity, they are harvested and put into purified water to expel sand that may be inside the shells before they are shipped live to restaurants and markets.





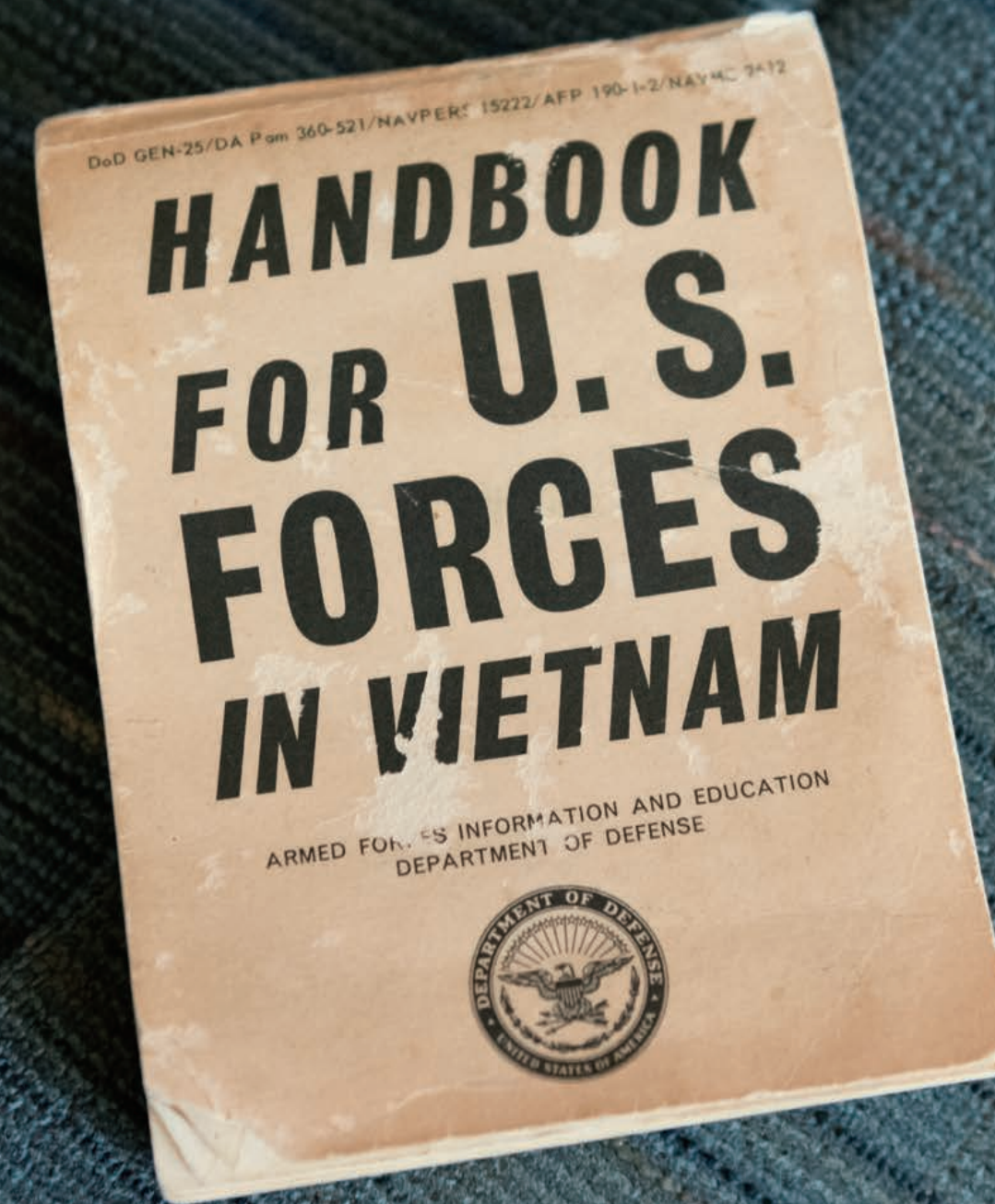
Naval veteran Bill Burton's home is in Smith Beach, just west of Eastville and only a few miles north of Cheriton. Inside a butterfly carving is pinned to a window curtain; Bill explained that his wife, Janet, put it there before she passed away and he didn't want to move it. In one of the bedrooms, Bill has a desk set up where he used to paint and finish his wooden carvings. Unfortunately, due to cancer, Bill had to stop carving. In addition to multiple carvings in each room of his home are certificates from his service: his 2011-2012 Legionnaire of the Year award, a Membership certificate from the Patrol Boat River Forces Veterans Association, the citation representing his Bronze Star from Vietnam, and a volunteer firefighter plaque. In another corner are photos of the USS Roberts and USS Antietam, and a group photo of the crew he served with during the Korean War.

At 19, Bill joined the Navy and went overseas to Korea where he worked on a destroyer as an engine room mechanic. Once the war and Bill's enlistment ended, he got a job in a shipyard. There, he saw sailors hanging out and thought, "That's for me." He reenlisted for Vietnam. Bill later became a Black Beret "River Rat." Assigned to patrol boats, River Rats had dangerous jobs, and as the boat captain Bill risked being shot or

hit with a mortar. He showed me photos he took while on the rivers, having sent the film back home to his parents for processing. He tried to keep "a lot of the bad stuff out," he said.

Bill didn't want to date while he was in the service; he saw too many heartbreaks when women back home wrote "Dear John" letters to the other men. He married Janet, whom he'd known in high school, right after his return to civilian life in 1976. Shortly thereafter they became parents, having two daughters within a year of getting married. "I had to catch up on lost time," Bill half-joked.

After his return home, Bill started carving. The Shore has many artists; for years Bill loved to help young people and others get into the hobby by teaching them his skills, and he is a member of an artist's guild. He also has butterflies and other sculptures in the local nature museum, as well as in Branson, MO, and Raleigh, NC.







Edgar "Ed" Steward was born in Taylor County, IA, and enlisted in the Navy at age 20 shortly after the attack on Pearl Harbor. He was trained as a Pharmacist Mate (Hospital Corpsman) and assigned to the 5th Marine Division. In 1945 he was sent to Japan to accompany the Marines and support emergency care as an operating tech and nurse during the Battle of Iwo Jima. After sailing aboard the USS Talladega (APA 208), he helped set up a 16' x 16' tent hospital on the beach and assisted in treating some of the 26,000+ casualties.

Once back from the Pacific theater, Ed married in January 1946. He and his wife would welcome their first of three sons, Dave, later that year in Norfolk, VA. The family hopscotched around the country to various bases until January, 1948, when Ed was discharged and couldn't find a job. He re-enlisted and served at a Naval hospital in Texas. There, Ed continued to train with Marines for both the Korean and Vietnam Wars.

During the Korean War, Ed was aboard the USS Consolation (AH15); a member of the Pacific Fleet, the Consolation served as a hospital ship, the first one fitted with a helicopter pad so the wounded could be flown in from field

hospitals. Aboard the Consolation he was promoted to chief. Ed was deployed with the 3rd Marine Division during Vietnam as a commander in the Medical Service Corps. He served in a MASH Hospital in Quang Tri, three miles from the DMZ. Ed received the Bronze Star for his actions there. After the war, he was assigned for duty as the Administrative Medical Officer at Atlantic Fleet Headquarters (CINCLANT).

Ed was the XO of Boone Clinic at Little Creek; he was promoted to captain in 1973, served at the Pentagon, and finished his career as the CO of Field Medical Service School at Camp Johnson, NC. Ed is a "Mustang," a slang term referring to a commissioned officer who started as an enlisted service member. In total, Ed's service spans from March 21, 1942 – Jan 1, 1980, and he has been a member of the Legion since the 1940's, after a CO at Camp Pendleton encouraged his participation.

Additionally, Ed was commissioned as an ordained lay pastor with the Presbyterian church. He gave sermons if the chaplain was not there before having his own church in Chinquapin, NC, for 14 years. Ed is also a member of DAV and a PUFL with the Legion.

Dave Steward was born into a military family – his father, Ed, a prominent officer in the Navy, relocated the family many times throughout Dave's life. A few years after graduating from high school, Dave chose to enlist; tensions were growing in Vietnam and he had a draft status of 1A. In July, 1967, Dave was officially sworn into the Navy. Ed, a Commander at that time, officiated Dave's swearing-in ceremony at the base in Texas as he was transferring through on orders. Ed said the experience was "like giving a daughter away for marriage. It was emotional."

In January of 1968, Dave went to Japan and was liaison to the U.S. Naval Ship Repair Facility as Storekeeper Third Class; he would serve until March of 1969. A month later, he was picked up for assignment with Operation Deep Freeze II. He spent 13 months at Palmer Station just off the coast of the Antarctic Peninsula. Palmer Station is only accessible by ship and Dave was one of ten men who wintered there. Afterwards, Dave went to college on the GI Bill and graduated in 1974.

He began working at a marketing research company in the late 1990's and then obtained Coast Guard training to be licensed as captain in 2005. While a boat captain, he met his wife, Hania, a Polish-born daughter of a Holocaust

survivor. They were married in 2012 on their sailboat in Cape Charles. In April, 2015, his father Ed moved in with Dave and Hania. They remodeled their home to add extra space to make Ed's stay comfortable.

Dave didn't join the Legion until he moved to Cheriton and witnessed the post's impact on the immediate community, especially the lives of fellow veterans. Dave was asked to be a volunteer bartender for the Legion, so he and Hania bartended for several years while Hania started to cook meals on various nights for the veterans. Dave was commander from 2012 to 2013, and assumed the finance officer position thereafter. "Only in America can you go from bartender to commander," he joked.





Rex Ingram grew up on a farm outside of Lancaster, South Carolina, during the Great Depression. He and his older brother went to a two-room school without electricity or plumbing. After their father died, they bounced around among various relatives. When Rex was 17, he decided to forge his aunt and uncle's signatures and enlist in the Navy like his older brother, who joined two years prior.

On his first try, Rex was underweight and flunked the physical; he eventually passed and went on to serve in WWII, Korea, and Vietnam. His experience in Korea as a Naval Medic for the 3rd Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment was significant; for his platoon of 43 men, Rex served as the priest, psychologist, and record keeper, all while trying to keep his men alive. Frostbite and other injuries suffered during the Korean War would not be life-threatening by today's standards; however, medical techniques of the era, limited penicillin and antibiotics, and consistent engagement with the enemy led to overwhelming casualties.

After Korea, Rex began treatment for what is now called post-traumatic stress disorder, and his psychiatrist encouraged him to write poetry about his experiences. "I started writing after my episode in Korea. I left Korea under guard, and repressed this; my first wife never knew I was in Korea." Around 1991, Rex began to share his

writing with those closest to him. His poems speak to the war experiences he kept secret for so many years: the horror, the death, and the quandary of moral injury. For Rex, the impossible choice between executing his military duty and obeying God's law was overwhelming. "My second wife and I were married for 10 years before I tried to commit suicide. I never wore any of my medals. None of my shipmates ever knew any of my background. I never talked about it. Some of them would sit around and tell war stories and I would just walk out."

Rex's life after the war has been just as valiant and interesting. Once he returned to the Shore he began teaching science at the public school and eventually became principal ten years later. Rex became a Virginia supreme court magistrate for a few years and also joined the Coast Guard Auxiliary. He wore the uniform, used his own boats, taught boating safety, examined vessels, and patrolled the waters of the Chesapeake Bay area.



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LINGHAM, REX B.

Bruce Arnold spent his early years in a small mining camp 400 miles west of Anchorage, AK, called Nyac. He enjoyed fishing, hunting, and being outside all the time. After completing first grade via correspondence course, he attended a one-room school with children from the seven other families in town; all were Inuits except the Arnolds. During WWII the family moved to Anchorage, where his father's skills as a heavy equipment operator and mechanic were valuable to the war effort, and later to Montana so his father could work at Malmstrom Air Force Base in Great Falls.

After a year of college Bruce joined the Navy. During boot camp he wondered about his choice. "I've been known not to make the best decisions," he joked. Bruce remembers his time on a carrier, the USS Hornet, and a destroyer, and the long deployments to Vietnam and the South China Sea. When that term of service ended, Bruce went back to school on the GI Bill at UW Seattle and earned a bachelor's degree in geology. He worked at a mining company in Spokane before joining the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, a branch of uniformed service with a civilian crew.

Bruce's uniformed service totaled 32 years, over which he rotated from sea duty, to mobile field duty, to shore duty. He sailed on ships out of both U.S. coasts and in the Atlantic, Pacific,

and Indian Oceans; he was a qualified diver as well. Bruce's shore assignments varied from a marine geology lab outside Miami, FL, where he worked with Dr. Harris B. Stewart, an internationally recognized oceanographer; to a stint on Capitol Hill in the the Office of Senator Ted Stevens of Alaska; to assignments with the Oceanographer of the Navy and the National Reconnaissance Office.

After retiring, Bruce moved to the Eastern Shore in 1999, a short distance from the post. In addition to the multiple hobbies he has found in retirement, Bruce became active in The American Legion "to give something back." As commander, he and his adjutant purchased the present building in which Post 56 resides. Along with other members of the post, Bruce initiated an inspirational program that structured visits between post members and veterans at the local nursing home and rehab facility.





The SAL Squadron at Post 56 was chartered in 2007 with 10 members and now has 60. Marvin Milton is the current finance officer and acting commander. He spends many hours each week supporting the post in honor of his father who was drafted into Patton's 3rd Army and died in WWII. The SAL supports the post by hosting two Friday night dinners and two Texas Hold'em events each month. As of 2016, the SAL had raised \$80,000 to support the post. In addition to fundraising, it helps with maintenance, shopping for supplies, and most other volunteer opportunities. "It's the little things you do that make a lot of difference," Marvin said.

Also in the spirit of giving, Auxiliary Unit 56 holds an annual poppy sale, which covers utility bills and the like for vets in need of financial assistance. The proceeds also fund a veterans appreciation dinner that includes drinks and entertainment. In 2016 the post was unable to host the dinner due to lack of volunteers. Instead, President Jill Combs held a yard sale and raised over \$1,100 with donated items. The Auxiliary also made "pocket flags" to send to troops overseas so they would always have a flag with them.





At 17, Dave Krough quit high school and joined the Army. An avid technology lover, he joined electronic intelligence and worked with computers after his first re-enlistment. Dave would spend a total of 21 years in the Army. In 2015, he and his wife moved to the the Shore and both became involved in Post 56. He jokes that his brother in law, Bill Lewis, "hoodwinked" him into joining the post and encouraged him to get involved as adjutant. The two men started the 9/11 Memorial Dinner, which features a seafood boil, silent auction, raffle, and dancing. Dave and Bill, as the "Bay Soundz" DJs, provide entertainment throughout the evening.

The Eastern Shore is home to several 9/11 first responders and the commitment to *never forget* is evident. Some of the proceeds from the dinner benefit Freedom Hunters, the post's non-profit partner, which provides outdoor experiences for wounded veterans, from hunting game to collecting seashells at the Barrier Islands. Marine veteran Dan Thoele, who helps runs the group, explains that some wounds and scars received in service are unseen, and that supporting wounded warriors and their families means providing them a true sense of belonging to the American community and a reminder that "they are never left behind."





Jake Hoinski and his wife Maggie love to travel in their deluxe RV, stopping in towns to visit other Legion posts. Jake retired in 2006 and moved to Cheriton, where Maggie's son David has a seafood business. The couple purchased several properties along the shore; the area reminds them of where they lived on Long Island. Jake now stays busy helping out David, delivering crabs for picking and cleaning in a refrigerated truck.

Jake was talked into being Post 56's finance officer when he became involved with the Legion in 2007; at that time there were few records to work with. When the post purchased the old grocery store the previous year, the bank helped make a deal to buy two buildings adjacent to the property. "It sounded really good at the time to have the buildings, but no one really thought about all the factors," Jake said. The post owed over \$3,000 each month on properties and had too little income to cover the payments.

Bill Stramm helped refinance to save \$600 per month, and the post is now financially stable. Jake started Friday night dinners, which make money and provide locals a decent meal at a reasonable price. In the eight years the post has been doing dinners, there has been a constant struggle to find volunteers to cook and serve. "We need young blood," Bill said.



Bill O'Hare originally joined a Legion post in Maryland in 2008, but did not participate. He and his wife Barbara moved to Cape Charles in 2015 and transferred his membership to Post 56; he likes that they are now "visible and active." Bill was a statistician after his service, focused on working with children and early childhood intervention. The well-being of kids on the Eastern Shore is low overall – a judgment determined by data points reflecting poverty, state testing, infant mortality, single parents, and other metrics. Bill wants to start a children and youth program after he gets better acquainted with the community.

On September 11, 2016, members of Post 56 held a service at the Northampton County Veteran's War Memorial in Cape Charles to honor those who lost their lives as well as the first responders who were forever affected by the experience. Several shops in town closed and their employees joined the small crowd, huddled in the shade to escape the hot midday sun.





Periwinkles

VETERANS WAR MEMORIAL
DEDICATED BY
AMERICAN LEGION
NORTHAMPTON
POST 56
CAPE CHARLES
1989



Jim Chapman has been a driving force of Post 56 since he first joined in 1991; he also has broad influence statewide with the Virginia American Legion as the 2015-2016 Department of Virginia Commander. He helps posts gain charters at the state level, most notably VA Post 775 at the Pocahontas State Correctional Center. The Legion is committed to assisting all veterans, even those behind bars, and Jim said having a Legion post helps inmates remember their patriotic years and inspires feelings of belonging.

There are currently 215 active posts in Virginia. In 2013, Post 400, located five miles north of Cheriton, was the first in the state to have its charter revoked. The community had complained to local police about fights and shootings, a consequence of the post being rented out to the public for parties that got “out of hand.” The department plans to take money from the sale of Post 400 and buy a building for another Virginia post that does not have a home.



JC Carstens grew up on a military base while his father served in the Air Force. After four years in the Navy, JC joined his father at work as a Chesapeake Bay Bridge-Tunnel police officer. As a corporal for the CBBT, he oversees the security of 20 miles of bridges and tunnels, ensuring safety and toll compliance for the passing vehicles. For JC, it's been a family affair to work for the CBBT – his father served as a CBBT officer for 17 years (following a 20 year career in the Air Force), his mother worked as a toll collector and his cousin, R.L. Carpenter, is a fellow officer. (Carpenter is also a member of Post 56 and served in the 82nd Airborne Division 4/325 ABCT.)

JC is the sergeant-at-arms for Post 56; at the 9/11 memorial services he rings a bell for each war in which U.S. soldiers have fought. The post is important to JC and his community, and he demonstrates care and affection for fellow post members. Every time JC sees someone he knows, he makes sure to tell them that he loves them. "I enjoy being part of this family."





Post 56 is a family network that develops talent and invests in the community. Active military members Tony and Samantha Jette moved to Cape Charles after Samantha got a job as a dentist at the Naval base in Norfolk. They selected the small community as a good place to raise their son. The area's rural feel yet close proximity to the city makes the location just right for them. While working on the remodel of their new home, electrician and Post 56's 2nd Vice Commander Larry McKlusky encouraged the young couple to attend a monthly post meeting and join as members – Tony became the finance officer after his first meeting. Soon after hearing that Tony was looking for employment, Bill Stramm helped Tony get a job as an officer in the Cape Charles Police Department. "Everyone should be willing to step up," according to Tony. "Young people can help break the stigma that the Legion is only old people."

Members are connected through the common bond of service to their country, and they treat each other like family. Friday night suppers are well-attended, featuring the culinary talents of members and their families. The Auxiliary and the SAL take the lead each week by promoting the menu, both on the post's Facebook page and through copied menus, available at the bar for patrons to review throughout the week. One Friday during my

visit was Rib Night and the bar was packed with hungry customers, the kitchen filled with volunteers who cooked, plated, and served ribs along with several sides.

On any given night, regulars like Bill Burton would come in and visit over a beer or cocktail, watch a sporting event or *Jeopardy*, and say farewell to each other with hugs. When people spoke of Bill, they referred to him as their grandfather and showered his frail body with affection. He often donated his prized carvings to post raffles and gifted them to friends.

In early 2017, I received word from bar regulars that Bill had become too ill to stop in nightly for a single "Natty" Light and talk with friends; they warned that his absence was a precursor to the inevitable. Bill died in February 2017 after a long battle with cancer. As stated in the post's public announcement of Bill's passing, he will always be remembered for his gentle and calm attitude while sitting at the post giving fatherly advice to other members. Bill lives on in the gift of his carvings and in the hearts of his Legion family.

POST 319 CODY, NEBRASKA



POPULATION 155





Two identical signs positioned on each end of town along Highway 20 announce the presence of the Sandhills treasure, Cody, Nebraska – “A Town Too Tough to Die.” Just a short drive from the South Dakota border, Cody is located in Cherry County; at 6,000 square miles, it is by far Nebraska’s largest county in land area, larger than the states of Delaware and Rhode Island combined. Originally a railroad outpost, Cody attracted settlers during the late 1800s and a school was built. Today, bus routes feed a consolidated system in which area students attend K-5 in the nearby community of Kilgore and finish at Cody’s modern high school, one of just two in all of Cherry County. The school has kept the town going and its events are well-attended. An annual Memorial Day weekend festival called “Circle C Days” is a highlight at the end of each year, featuring a bonfire dance party, town parade, rodeo, and alumni events.

In the 1930s and ‘40s, Cody’s livestock yards shipped out cattle by the thousands. Legion member Bob Schneider’s father had a ranch just south of Cody, and Bob remembers being the first in the area to get electricity, put in irrigation, and use a combine. His family got indoor water when he was in grade school in the 1940s. When rail traffic began losing ground to the trucking industry, the population began to decline. The railroad was eventually stripped of track and is now a walking trail along Highway

20, part of the Rails to Trails Conservancy. The farm crisis of the mid-1980s further contributed to the population decline. By 2013, the census count was 156.

The Circle C Market, situated right off the road and next to an old grain elevator, is operated as part of a school and community initiative. According to longtime resident and community activist Eva Nollette, what is on the highway can make or break a town. “We were almost a wheel but we were short one spoke – the grocery store. We had to consider, where is our community going? What are our goals?”

In 2009, the project to bring a market to town began – the nearest grocery store is about 40 miles away in Valentine. The market was also intended to provide entrepreneurial support and work experience for students in an area where after-school jobs are limited primarily to ranch work or household chores. The building was built with over 550 bales of straw from veteran Jerry Fullerton’s family ranch property and covered in stucco, the design based on resident George Johnson’s recently built artisanal vinegary building and funded by local businesses, members of the community, and several grants. “This project is about the students. It’s a promise to them,” Village of Cody Board Chairman and veteran John Johnson has said. “If you empower the youth, they will rise to the occasion.”



Michael E. Jones



Robert H. Schneider



Gary Gene Eberly



Lawrence T. Johnson

previous page, from left to right

Michael E. Jones

Born: 1957, Albany, GA
E-5, U.S. Air Force
Enlisted: 08/1975 - 08/1981
MOS: Sheet Metal Mechanic
Prior to service: student
After: industrial insulation, fire fighter
Joined The American Legion: 2008
Post position: Vice Commander

Robert H. Schneider

Born: 1935, Nebraska
PFC U.S. Army
Enlisted: 01/1957 - 12/1958
Qualifications: FDC, Radio operator, Vehicle driver
MOS: Artillery Vehicle Driver
Prior to service: ranch hand
After: mechanic, owner / operator Ford Auto Dealership
Joined The American Legion: 1960
Post position: Member

Gary Gene Eberly

Born: 1938, Mullin, NE
SP4, CPL, U.S. Army
Enlisted: 10/17/1957 - 10/16/1959
MOS: Paratrooper, Gunner 106 Recoiless Rifle, 12
Gunner, Assist. Squad Leader
Prior to service: ranching
After: ranching
Joined The American Legion: 1961
Position: Sergeant-At-Arms
Previous position: Adjutant, Commander

Lawrence T. Johnson

Born: 1938, Ainsworth, NE
PFC, U.S. Army
Inducted: 01/09/1962 - 01/09/1964
MOS: Aviation Electronic Equipment Repairman
Prior to service: USGS Surveyor
After: USGS Surveyor
Joined The American Legion: 1970
Post position: Adjutant



Adam Johnson

Born: 1983, Gordon, NE
E-3, U.S. Air Force National Guard
Enlisted: 5/2003 - 5/2009
MOS: POL
Prior to service: student
After: rancher
Joined TAL: 2003
Post position: Member

John T. Johnson

Born: 1947, Lexington, NE
PFC 4, U.S. Army
Inducted: 1970 - 1972, Vietnam
Qualifications: Airborne Training
MOS: 101 and 173 Airborne
Prior to service: student
After: ranching,
education / teacher
Joined TAL: 1972
Post position: Member

Susan K. Johnson

Born: 1947, Valentine, NE
Occupation: retired
Joined ALA: 1982
Unit position: Membership Chair
Relation to veteran:
wife (John T. Johnson)

Carol L. Johnson

Born: 1943, Nebraska
Occupation: retired
Joined ALA: 1990
Unit position: Chaplain
Relation to veteran: sister
(Larry and John Johnson), mother



Donald E. Adams

Born: 1932, Valentine, NE
Yeoman 3rd Class, U.S. Navy
Enlisted: 6/1951 - 6/1955
Qualifications: typing / filing
Prior to service:
feed mill in Omaha
After: Postmaster, mail carrier
Joined TAL: 1955
Post position: Member
Previous: Commander, Adjutant

Gary M. Cady

Born: 1941, Valentine, NE
E-7, U.S. Navy
Enlisted: 3/31/1958 - 4/15/1977
MOS: Torpedoman,
USS Hunley (AS31)
Prior to service: farm kid
After: owner operator truck driver,
rancher
Joined TAL: 1988
Post position: Member

Jimmy L. Heath

Born: 1950, Valentine, NE
E-5, U.S. Army National Guard
Enlisted: 1971 - 1977
Qualifications: Artillery
Mechanics Course
MOS: 13A10 Artillery Basic,
Howitzer Unit
Prior to service: rancher
After: rancher, livestock trucker
Joined TAL: 1999
Post position: Member

Jerry J. Fullerton

Born: 1953, Martin, SD
E-6, U.S. Navy Reserve
Enlisted: 3/8/1973 - 3/7/1979,
Vietnam, 7/12/1985 - 5/2009
Qualifications: ETA School, ETC
School (IFF, Radar Repeaters)
MOS: Electronics Technician,
Radar and Communication
Prior to service: agriculture,
electronics
After: agriculture, ranching
Joined TAL: 1977
Post position: Vice Commander

Jerry L. Purdum

Born: 1973, North Platte, NE
E-5, U.S. Army
Enlisted: 10/1991 - 3/1999,
Somalia, Bosnia
MOS: 88M
Prior to service: ranch hand
After: truck driver
Joined TAL: 2012
Post position: Member

Dallas Wyckoff

Born: 1981, Ainsworth, NE
E-5 SGT, U.S. Army
Enlisted: 7/13/2000 - 9/1/2008,
Operation Iraqi Freedom,
Operation Enduring Freedom
Qualifications: Signal Support
MOS: 31U, 25U
Prior to service: ranch hand
After: truck driver
Joined TAL: 2012
Post position: Member

Forrest L. Eberly

Born: 1943, Mullin, NE
E-5, U.S. Army
Inducted: 10/12/1965 - 10/12/1967
Qualifications: Cooking School
MOS: Cook
Prior to service: ranch hand
After: construction worker
Joined TAL: 1967
Post position: Member

Leon L. Eberly

Born: 1945, Sennica, NE
E-4, U.S. Army
Inducted: 1967- 1969, Vietnam
MOS: Radio Repairman
Prior to service: ranch hand
After: ranch hand
Joined TAL: 1969
Post position: Member



William H. Williams

Born: 1947, Gordon, NE
E-5, U.S. Army
Enlisted: 1968 - 1970, Vietnam
MOS: ARTY, TET 1969
Prior to service: ranch hand
After: ranch hand
Joined The American Legion: 1986
Post position: Commander

Betty Williams

Born: 1949, Valentine, NE
Occupation: retired
Joined ALA: 2006
Unit position: Vice President
Relation to veteran: wife (William H. Williams)





Jean Vackiner

Born: 1965
Occupation: registered nurse
Joined ALA: 1998
Unit position: President
Relation to veteran:
daughter, wife, mother

Eva Nollette

Born: 1927, Bassett, NE
Occupation: retired
Joined ALA: 1952
Unit position: Member
Previous: President, State President
Relation to veteran: wife

Chelsea (Fullerton) Luthy

Born: 1991, Valentine, NE
Occupation: community development specialist
Joined ALA: 1991
Unit position: Youth Leader
Relation to veteran:
daughter (Jerry Fullerton)

Kate Fullerton

Born: 1955, New Bedford, MA
Occupation: retired
Joined ALA: 1979
Unit position: Member
Relation to veteran:
wife (Jerry Fullerton)

Douglas M. Goshorn

Born: 1962. Gordon, NE
MAJ/04, U.S. Army
Enlisted: 3/1983 - 7/2012
MOS: Administrative Clerk, Communication Lineman
Commissioned: 1990, OIF, OEF, War on Terror
Officer: Engineer Platoon Leader, Engineer Company Commander, Military Police Company Commander, Battalion S-1 Officer, Battalion S-3 Officer, Battalion XO / Admin Officer, Battalion S-2
Prior to service: student
After: retired
Joined The American Legion: 2013
Position position: Member
Previous: 2nd Vice Commander



AMERICAN LEGION
POST 319





American Legion Reike-Meidl Post 319 was chartered in 1926 and named for two deceased WWI soldiers from the Cody area. The post operated the Legion Club, a meeting hall and bar, before purchasing the former White Elephant Hall in the 1940s. One of the more popular halls in the county, the White Elephant drew large crowds during its prime by hosting parties that featured live performances by touring bands. The final dance, accompanied by gambling, took place in June of 1957; the hall was shut down after run-ins with the liquor inspector over regulations. The Legion Club continued to function as a bar until the 1980s.

In 2000, the former Legion Club was sold to Pat Miller (who also owns the Husker Hub), and space in the White Elephant was converted into a meeting room so veterans could gather once a month for meetings. In 2014, the post partnered with the local school system, transforming the old dance hall into an indoor basketball court for junior high and high school students.

The school's involvement, along with the hard work of Larry Johnson and other post and community members, enabled necessary structural and electrical improvements to the hall; the partnership also makes practicing easier for rural athletic students with long commutes.

Post 319 participates in the Veterans Day events at the school, and provides the color guard at each high school football game.

Gary Eberly started a "Hunter's Steak Supper" that kicks off the hunting season each year; the post usually makes about \$1,000 selling steaks for \$14 each. In the past, the post collaborated with other area posts to sponsor County Government Day but hasn't done so for the last few years due to declining participation. In 2016, Legion membership was at 82; the post survives with the handful of active members who live in town and the immediate surrounding areas, but the bulk of other members live out of state. Participation wavers throughout the year depending on the season; most members are ranchers or farmers and carry the responsibility of their livestock and land.

American Legion Auxiliary Unit 319 is a "behind the scenes" support team for the post. Members bake cookies, furnish salads and work in the dining room during the Hunter's Steak Supper, and bring ditty bags to the nearest VA hospital, three hours away in Hot Springs. While five or six people from the unit do most of the work, in 2016 there were 119 members; similar to the post, the bulk of them live outside Cody. Chelsea Fullerton Luthy is the unit's youth leader and a member of the Americanism Committee, which educates young people in the traditions of patriotism and American pride.





Larry Johnson is part of a large Irish Catholic family – one of nine children. His mother was a teacher when the family moved to Cody in 1960 after living in nearby Mission Ranch. Today, most members of the Johnson family are actively involved in Post 319, either as Legion or Auxiliary members. Of the five Johnson boys, four served in the military. There are currently six Johnsons in the Auxiliary unit and five Johnsons in the post.

Larry worked for the U.S. Geological Survey after his service doing survey and reclamation throughout many Western states. He has a map in his home workshop, with little push pins marking each place he lived and worked before moving back to Cody to be closer to his family. He liked moving around, but Cody and the Sandhills are his home. He owns a few properties in Cody, and recently sold one house to his niece Emily when she moved back to town; she returned home to start a family and work with her father George at the family vinegery, George Paul Vinegars, while her husband got a job with a wind energy company in the area

Members of the post are proud to have served our country and encourage other vets to join them in keeping their post active. "Larry does a lot," said Vice Commander Mike Jones. Most of the members credit Larry for keeping



the post running smoothly, and they recognize how important being the adjutant is in his life. Larry is divorced and does not have children – his main daily tasks are helping friends in town, hanging out at the Husker Hub, and running most aspects of Post 319. He has an office set up in his living room; membership rosters and brochures lie on his dining room table.





On July 5th, 2015, Doug Goshorn and Josh Jones took down all of the flags they put up for Fourth of July weekend. The flags had been kept lit throughout the night, displayed on brackets mounted to light poles. A member had designed a custom grabbing pole to reach each flag easily.

Josh moved to Cody to be with his Uncle Mike and Aunt Bea after finding himself a single father of two young children. He volunteers for the Legion and has embraced the community since his arrival by helping mow lawns and do odd jobs for elderly residents. He is also the community trash collector, a town council member, and a bartender at the Husker Hub.





Born in rural Nebraska, Eva Nollette displayed an independent drive since she was young. Her father did not approve of educating children past the point they'd be able to work in the fields or on the ranch, but Eva defied him, working for other ranchers and babysitting to earn money for clothes and school books. "He said, 'Well, all you're going to be is a damned educated fool,' and I thought, how do you talk to a parent like that? I responded, 'Well dad, I'd rather be an educated fool than just a plain damned fool.' He knew after that I needed to have my own life, a better place in this world."

After graduating from high school, Eva married a WWII veteran and worked installing telephone lines outdoors. Her husband was abusive; she packed up her three children and moved to Cody where the four of them rented a small room above the filling station.

Once settled, Eva became a cook. She first worked at a cafe in town where she met her second husband, Tom, a Korean War vet, with whom she had three more children. After the cafe closed, Eva got a job as the high school cook and started a grant-funded breakfast program for students. She is a founder of the Cowboy GRIT committee (Growing, Revitalizing, Investing,

Teamwork), which works to sustain the Circle C Market, and she's been active in the Auxiliary for over 60 years. One of her favorite annual activities is the membership tour every December. A caravan of vehicles travels from Ainsworth to Long Pine to Springview to Valentine to Cody to Hot Springs, bringing gifts, cookies, and hugs to veterans in the area. "Those are the things that fill my world with happiness – making things better for somebody by simple things you do."





Gary Eberly and his family lived about 50 miles south of Cody before moving to town in 1953 when he started high school. He and his three brothers served in the military; Gary volunteered for the draft so his active service was two years instead of three. After basic training he signed up for jump school, looking to earn double pay as a paratrooper, bringing his total to \$110 each month.

Gary is a cowboy, and at 77 he is still at work helping other ranchers during calving season and rolling around town on his tractor mowing hay. Forrest Eberly, his younger brother, often helps with the hay mowing and baling. All four Eberly brothers joined Post 319 shortly after their service ended; Gary has been active as the sergeant-at-arms since 1990, and he served as commander and adjutant for years previous to that.

Gary organizes and directs the color guard for every home football game, funeral, and parade, calling members and making sure they know where they need to be and when.



He is a small man with piercing blue eyes who speaks with a subdued drawl. The other members know they cannot say no to Gary, whose service to The American Legion has earned the respect of the community. He had knee replacement surgery in 2015; after surgery he quickly had to go out to help on a nearby ranch for calving season, staying out in the fields ten hours a day. A horse kicked him and set his recovery back; he now drives four hours to the Ft. Meade VA Hospital for shots to keep his knees going.

Gary explained that many small ranches have combined and now larger operations are buying them up. Fewer ranches means fewer workers are needed; moreover, modern machines require less manpower. He still finds plenty of work, saying that it "seems like the older people are the ones who go out workin', not the younger ones."

Gary picked me up at the post one bright morning with two trailered female horses, Puddin and Pockets. I got Puddin, a gentle 15-year-old, and we rode through the Sandhills surrounding Cody. I was on his daughter's saddle from her senior year, with "NHSRA 1982 Girls Cutting" engraved on the fender. Gary's dogs, Saint and Gizmo, ran directly behind the horses, sometimes straying a bit and then running back toward us.





Don Adams has been a continuous member of Post 319 for over 60 years. He explains that participation has become less and less frequent over time, but especially since the Vietnam War. "WWI guys were very active," he said. "The Vietnam vets are bitter. It was different." Don's father served in the Army during WWI and was also a member of Post 319. Don grew up attending a rural country school until he entered high school and his family moved to Cody. After graduating he joined the Navy, inspired by his older brother who was already serving. He spent 18 months on Guam and was part of an amphibious unit for nine months in Japan. After service, Don became the Cody Postmaster for 35 years and then worked as a mail carrier for another dozen.

Don remembers the dances held at the White Elephant Hall; once Lawrence Welk came to perform with his orchestra. In the area, dances rotated between small towns, and people would travel miles to the town hosting the dance. At the dances Don said, "the liquor was flying." Fights happened often and Don was a regular participant.





Mike Jones and his wife Bea, who works at the post office, moved to Cody in 2008 to retire and live in a peaceful place with land. They have a chickens, a horse, and a small herd of Dexter cattle. Mike took me out into the Sandhills on his four-wheeler with his dog Freckles to show me the Dexters and the hills just north of his property.

When asked, Mike says he's "from everywhere"; his father was a career Marine, but he's a "cracker by birth – any male born in Georgia is a cracker, a female is a peach." He explained that in Georgia, "cracker" sometimes is used in a neutral or positive way, or self-descriptively with pride. He was pretty much raised in the South, and he can trace his ancestry and their military service back to the Revolutionary War. As a child, he loved watching Marine Corps 8mm films and John Wayne movies. Mike's oldest brother was in the Navy, and went on to a career in the Air Force. When Mike was 17, he visited his brother stationed in Fairfield, CA, and enlisted in the Air Force Reserve at that time – it was the last year of Vietnam. Mike worked as a sheet metal mechanic on a C-5 transport aircraft at the Travis Air Force Base. He tried to enlist in the Navy after the Air Force; the Navy said he could be a "fireman," but that meant working in a hole on a steam fire, shoveling coal.

Over the years, Mike had many different jobs including working as a mechanic for the fire department and as a paramedic, which led to a back injury. During our visit, he paused, apologized, and said that his medication was kicking in. After crushing a vertebra, he had titanium rods placed in his back and now walks with a cane. Cracking the top of one of his femurs in another accident led to retirement. The medications help him manage the pain.





On the Fourth of July, many Cody residents made the 40-mile trip to Valentine for a demolition derby and fireworks show. At the fairgrounds, Doug Goshorn sat with Josh Jones and his kids, intently watching the spectacle. At one point, the announcer called for all the kids to gather at the gate in one corner of the track; they were let in and formed a somewhat orderly line, and people in the center threw candy to them. In the distance, a storm approached, visible from miles away on the vast Nebraska horizon.

Josh and Doug decided it was best to head back to Cody before the storm hit. As we drove our separate vehicles, the sky turned black and bright flashes of lightning backlit the clouds ominously. The rain began just as I arrived behind the hall where my tent was set up; Doug pulled up behind me and offered to help. I said I was ok, but he got out and insisted on helping move my things into the hall. He was procedural, his military police background evident. "I'm going to unzip your tent," he said, right before he did so. "I'm going to remove your sleeping pad and bag." He quickly helped me carry the tent and its contents inside. We stood in the post's doorway, watching the storm.





Like many of the residents of Cody, Doug Goshorn is involved on a fundamental level in the town's inner workings, serving on the Village Board and keeping a general eye on things. He rides around Cody in his many vehicles, usually with his large golden lab Rocky and a firearm. He is the second vice commander, and one of the younger and newer members of Post 319.

His father served in the Korean War and earned a Purple Heart. In the 1980s, the farm crisis dried up the town and the surrounding area. Doug enlisted in the Army National Guard during his junior year of college and went on active duty. The National Guard has a role at the federal as well as the state level, so for a while Doug traveled full time in Europe. He also fought forest fires in the Black Hills. After spending 29 years in the military serving full time in the National Guard as a military police commander and retiring as a major, Doug found himself back in Cody, the town where he grew up.

One afternoon, Doug picked me up in his Jeep Wrangler, a shotgun mounted inside above the windshield, and we drove south of Cody to see the Niobrara River and his family ranch. He and his three brothers co-own the property; they've rented out most of the grazing land to



ranchers for some 20 years. Recently, Doug began staying in a trailer on someone else's property as a caretaker instead of staying on the ranch with his brother. We drove up to a taller hill overlooking the houses and barn area; Doug pulled out his binoculars to check for activity before we drove in.

Jerry Fullerton grew up on a ranch north of Cody. His mother was a nurse in the Navy during WWII and a member of Auxiliary Unit 319 throughout her life. Jerry enlisted in the Navy Reserves in 1973 during Vietnam and then re-enlisted to earn extra money and keep the family ranch going in 1985 during the farm crisis. He remained in the Reserve until 2009.

When he returned from Vietnam, having served on the USS Richard B. Anderson (DD-786), Jerry was treated badly in California and learned quickly not to wear his uniform in public. He and the other Vietnam vets enjoyed a "welcome home" parade in 2014, organized by Bill and Betty Williams – it was nice to feel appreciated after years of not receiving the respect displayed for veterans of previous wars. Jerry and his wife Kate, who was the principal at the high school, go to his ship's reunion every year and appreciate people saying thank you. Jerry usually doesn't talk about being a vet, but at every reunion he stands proudly, grateful for the recognition.

After a lifetime of ranching, Jerry stepped back so his daughter Chelsea and her husband Jordon Luthy could run the Fullerton Ranch. Generational ranching is a way of life in the Sandhills.





Chelsea, like many of today's young ranchers, embraces technology and educational opportunities, implementing them in the family business. Family ranches are usually passed down to the child that wants to continue the business, or the land is sold or leased to another ranch. Ranches are often several thousand acres with pastures, wells, and sometimes crops that need to be fed by a pivot irrigation system. The wells are life for cattle and crops, and expanding a property includes investing in a mechanical pump or windmill to bring fresh water up from the Ogallala aquifer, which is currently at risk for over-extraction and pollution.

In addition to farming and ranching, Chelsea works as the Community Development Specialist for Central Nebraska Economic Development District. As the Executive Director of GRIT, Chelsea was a driving force in the inception of the grocery store, along with her mom, Kate. An Auxiliary member since birth, Chelsea is now the Unit's Youth Leader and puts a great deal of energy into educating and encouraging children in the traditions of patriotism and American pride. "It is important to teach kids at a young age reverence for the flag

and vets. The more you do with them, the more they know." This includes flag etiquette, meeting with current and past military personnel, and participating in the annual Ditty Bag project for the Hot Springs (SD) Veterans Home.

Chelsea recalls that no other high school football team she knew of had a color guard at their games, and her own deep sense of American pride arose when she saw her father standing proud in the detail.







Current Unit 319 President Jean Vackiner works full time as a Registered Nurse at a nursing home in Valentine and advocates for the elderly. "There's not enough contact between generations. We need to start members young and take advantage of our town's isolation to prevent the whitewashing of history so history is not repeated. Your country has to mean something."

Years ago when Jean was the former school secretary, Eva Nollette was the school cook and blocked Jean on her way to the bathroom to get her to sign up for the Auxiliary. Jean is eligible because her father served in the Korean War and her father-in-law served in WWII. She has three boys; the oldest is 27 and in the Army National Guard out of Chadron, serving in a trucking unit. Jean has been president almost every year since joining the Unit; she also became involved at the department level and remembers doing unit reports to the tune of a song played by musicians at department conventions. Jean sang the national anthem at the 2016 Circle C Day Parade on Memorial Day weekend over a small PA system. Townspeople paused with their hands over their hearts, the Legion marchers standing at attention at the town's main crossroads.







Susan and John Johnson invited me to return to Cody for their family ranch's branding on Memorial Day 2016. The ranch is run by their son Mark and his wife Janelle, and has been in Susan's family since 1888. Brandings are a community affair. Entire families are involved, and the kids participate in the whole experience to prepare them for a possible future in the ranching business. For most of the month of May, ranchers help each other, bringing their own horses and trailers to assist. They take turns temporarily corralling calves away from their mothers so they can be immunized, given ear tags, castrated, and branded. The whole process, from roping to release, usually takes under a minute before the calf is back with its mother. At the Johnson ranch, there was a large dinner and drinks after in the main barn.

Some of the pre-teen girls asked me for my favorite patriotic saying, which caught me completely off guard. They said their favorites are "freedom isn't free" and "land of the free because of the brave." The way Cody-area children conduct themselves – their speech, manner, level of polite interaction with others – displays respect and reverence for our flag and country. John and Susan married in 1967, three years before John was drafted into the Army. After training, John requested assignment to Ft. Bragg but was instead sent to Vietnam.

He was with a small group that was attached to both the 101st and 173rd Airborne; they went out for a month at a time. Being attached to two divisions was a problem because John felt obligated to wear both patches but uniform regulations allow only one.

While John was overseas, Susan gave birth to their first son. They communicated via letters and talked on the phone occasionally. When John returned stateside, Susan was relieved. The couple had five children and both pursued careers in education as teachers. For years, they both worked on the Rosebud Indian Reservation on the South Dakota border north of Cody. John taught biology there for 17 years, fighting to provide education to the impoverished Native American population. John partnered with the University of Wyoming to collect water samples and provide data for research, in turn giving motivated students career opportunity ideas in an area that suffers an 80-90% unemployment rate and one of the highest youth suicide rates in the country.

Adam Johnson decided to join the military right after 9/11. He was speaking with a Marine recruiter at the high school as the towers were attacked. At first thought, he would join the Marines because there would be a war, but he ultimately decided he wanted to be a fighter pilot in the National Guard, go on to get a degree, get to know people, and then apply to be a fighter pilot. National Guard fighter pilots are more or less full time; it costs the military about \$2 million to train one, and pilots are required to stay in for a minimum of 10 years.

Adam went to the Anderson Air Force Base on Guam for 15 days, and the UAE Al Dhafra Air Base for 45 days. He fueled planes and tankers that refueled the tankers for mid-air refills. "War is messy," Adam said. He felt that his sense of duty evolved over time. At 18 he had different expectations of his service career and his understanding of "the enemy" was naive. "Now there is no clear enemy, clear objective; it is really difficult to make progress, if anything that we have done could be called progress."

Adam majored in animal science in college to prepare for his future as a rancher. In his junior year, his Uncle Doug died at 49. It was somewhat unexpected, and Adam decided to go home and take over the family ranch. He felt a sense of duty to sustain the ranch, and his younger brother and sister were not interested.

There's a lot of freedom and variety throughout the day doing different tasks, he said. "There's no average rancher." Adam explained that ranchers either do well by taking care of all aspects of the land and business, or get distracted and fail. "That's how ranches get lost – when a generation gets apathetic or doesn't have passion for it." Adam keeps a macro-view while staying on task with a micro-view daily.

Adam joined the American Legion, at the urging of his Uncle Larry, right when he got back from basic training. "Larry is always doing everything," Adam said, remembering from an early age seeing Larry and others participating in events and noting to himself, "these are veterans." Adam became a regular member in the color guard. He has a sense of obligation to the Legion, fellow service members, and his country. Adam remembers in his early teen years going hunting with his Uncle Ed's friend, a Marine sniper in Vietnam for whom Adam had a lot of respect. He thinks about this vet every time he looks at the flag; doing so allows him to find his center, ease his jitters, and see something bigger in the American flag. When Adam sees the flag carried, he looks at it with patience and reverence, so to be the person carrying it is a great honor for him.





I rushed to Cody the Friday of Memorial Day weekend 2016 to be in time for the Circle C Day festivities the following day. I drove straight west on Highway 20 from Illinois, but stopped in Valentine, too tired to press on, sleeping in my car at the town's campground. I arrived in Cody at 8am and pulled up to John and Susan Johnson's house; John was outside with Jean Vackiner and her husband putting the final touches on the Auxiliary float. I said hello and drove through town to find post members lining up to lead the parade, with several limited-mobility members preparing to ride in a covered trailer behind the marching color guard. Other participants included State Senator Al Davis, the 4H Club, and CSS Farms, who gave away boxes of potatoes.

While walking through the bleachers at the rodeo grounds I saw Eva Nollette sitting with her daughter and son-in-law in the shade of a car's open trunk. Eva hugged me and I felt the same connection I'd experienced when she told me her story months before. Emotion and exhaustion overwhelmed me, and I started to cry. Eva invited me to take a nap at her home and I laid down on a blanket in her yard, soaking in the fresh air.

That beautiful, sunny day unfolded around me like a movie – I remember the girls with long shiny braids riding by me on their horses, children with oversized belt buckles and little spurs on their cowboy boots, the church-run hamburger and pie stand. The Circle C festivities continued into the night as I retired to George and Karen Johnson's house. Strong storms were forecast and it was thought to be unsafe to camp behind the post as I had done the previous year.

Throughout both my stays, the Johnsons welcomed me into their homes and their lives; I attended family meals, a family reunion, and a wedding. With them I shared a Memorial Day branding attended by the bulk of the local ranchers, their wives, and children. Their warmth and openness made me feel at home, like a member of the Legion family and the Cody community, where I know I will be welcome when I return to visit again.

After starting this project, while going through paperwork from my maternal grandmother's home, I came across my grandfather's American Legion membership card and a letter inviting him to Gladstone Post 777's 40th anniversary party in 1975. The letter stated that the post wanted to meet him because he was a founding member. My grandfather passed away when I was a baby, and before I began this project I hadn't known he had served in the military (much less been a founding member of a Legion post!). When I realized this lineage afforded me the privilege to join the Legion family as an Auxiliary member, the choice was clear – it would be Auxiliary Unit 319 in the Nebraska Sandhills, one of the most beautiful places on earth.

Mariah L. Karson

Born: 1979, Evanston, IL

Occupation: photographer

Joined American Legion Auxiliary: 2016

Unit position: Member

Relation to veteran: granddaughter

(Emanuel J. Wexler, William G. Karson)



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