

Honoring those who served:

Clinton Williams and Douglas Williams

(Editor's Note: The following feature is a series of profiles that will honor war era veterans from Tonkawa. The bulk of the work and research was completed by Mike Schatz and edited by Ginger Hunter.)

For the past several months, the Tonkawa High School Military Recognition Committee solicited information from alumni for the display panels located in the new event center at the high school. The panels will be installed on the east side of the lobby next to a display showcasing the branches of military Tonkawa alumni represent. Mike Schatz is chair of the committee. The panels will be similar to those already in place honoring athletes inducted into the Blubaugh Memorial. Don Noles is the chair of the Blubaugh Memorial project. Both committees work under the auspices of the THS Alumni Association, led by Melinda Glasgow.

The military panels will include those who saw action in WWII, Korea, Vietnam, Iraq, Afghanistan, and other war zones. While collecting information, the committee received no WWI responses and few from WWII. However, the McCarter museum possessed a list of Tonkawa men who served in WWII, and one of the panels will feature those names. Whether it is a complete list is not known. One of those who responded with information about WWII was the Williams family. Cousins Sandra Wil-

liams Hudack, whose father was Clinton Williams, and Melinda Harris Glasgow, whose mother was Clint's sister, both sent information.

Clinton Williams

Clinton Williams, local businessman, was drafted by the U.S. Marine Corps in February of 1944 at the age of thirty-five. He did basic training in California and then was sent to the South Pacific. He took part in the battle of Pe La Lui, one of the major battles with the Japanese. Because of his age, the younger men in his platoon referred to him as the "old Man." He received an honorable discharge and returned home on December 23, 1945.

After his return, he began retipping bits and organized a drill bit company at Williams Iron Works. He continued at the companies, organizing Oil Tool Sales Company, Williams Machine Company, and OK Heat Treat Company. Williams Machine Company produced 5500 bits a month in sizes from 2 7/8 to 5 1/2 inches in diameter. The Oil Manufacturing Company produced up to 3000 bits a month in sizes 4/34 to 7/78.

In 1967, Clinton purchased Gruner and Company in Ponca City when Hans Gruner retired. In April 1970, Smith International purchased all of Clinton's businesses. He continued to run the companies until he retired in 1975. Tonkawa was a special place to Clinton, and he lived there until his death on August 30, 1986.

Douglas Octave Williams

Douglas Williams was born June 17, 1919 in Humble, Texas, and lived in Tonkawa until 1944. His parents were Clinton and Rosa Williams. Doug obtained a BS degree with honors from OU in 1941, an MA degree with honors from Stanford University in 1951, and an MA with honors from George Washington University in 1963. He served in the U.S. Navy beginning as an Ensign and attained the rank of Captain. He was a supply officer. Doug saw sea duty on cruisers and destroyers in the Pacific, Atlantic and the Mediterranean Sea, including duty on the USS Roanoke CL-145. One of his assignments during WWII was in the Northern Mariana Islands, most notably Saipan. Shore duty portions of his career included Naval Supply Centers, Naval Shipyards, and Naval Air Stations on the east and west coasts, Hawaii, Alaska, and the Navy Department in Washington D.C. His last two duty stations were Barber's Point Naval Air Station, Oahu, Hawaii, and Boston Naval Shipyard, Boston, Massachusetts. After retiring from the Navy in 1967, Doug continued to work; his last civilian job was with the Ball Brothers Research Corporation in Boulder, Colorado, working on the Orbiting Solar Observatory Satellite project. He died in 1970 in Englewood, California. Doug's medals, commendations and campaign ribbons include



CLINTON WILLIAMS



DOUGLAS WILLIAMS

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the American Theater, Asiatic/Pacific Theatre (Star), WWII Victory, Navy Occupation, and Korean Conflict.

This year's Homecoming celebration will feature alumni who were awarded service medals from conflicts in Iraq, Afghanistan, Granada and other war zones since Viet Nam. Although the deadline for submitting information was June 1, 2015, the committee will always take updates in order to better establish a complete list of Tonkawa alumni who served our country. Also, the committee is currently working to provide a registry link to the Alumni page on the high school's website. When complete, the registry will allow self-registration for any alumni who served in the military. Contact Mike Schatz at mschatz3@yahoo.com with information or questions.

Honoring those who served:

Todd Ross

(Editor's Note: The following feature is a series of profiles that will honor war era veterans from Tonkawa. The bulk of the work and research was completed by Mike Schatz and edited by Ginger Hunter.)

Todd Ross and Todd Corbin were the first men from Tonkawa to go to Afghanistan. Below, Todd Ross reflects on his experience.

When I was asked to write this, I wondered if they realized I have a hard time remembering yesterday, much less years ago. It's a good thing I took a lot of pictures and wrote letters. So here it goes: I left for basic training at Fort Sill in June of 1987. I had joined the Oklahoma National Guard as a cannon crewman. Growing up, I had seen the big guns in the parades and knew I wanted to shoot them, and I did. Being in the Tonkawa unit was one of the favorite times in my life, and it was like an extended family. We trained hard and shot 13 inch cannons from Wisconsin to Lawton. A little known fact about Tonkawa: we had a practice nuclear warhead that was assembled and disassembled in the back of a truck in the armory. Now we know depleted uranium is not safe. I got out in the 90s when they converted to Service Battery and moved to Enid. I took a break in service until after 9/11 when, like many Americans, I wanted to do what I could to help. So, I got back in as an Ammo handler in 700 SPT HHC. We trained from

Ft Polk, LA, to Camp Gruber Oklahoma.

In June 2003, I got my first call to active duty. Charlie Conaghan had a little ceremony for me and my family at the Heart in the Park, where he hung a big yellow ribbon in honor of my deployment (thinking about it now, almost 12 years later, still kind of chokes me up). I left for Ft. Carson in September 2003 and trained there for about a month before leaving for Afghanistan. Operation Security was very high, so we didn't know when we were moving. Just before we arrived, a soldier leaving the country wrote a letter home telling when they were returning. He never mailed it and threw it in the trash. It fell into enemy hands, and they blew up his transport. Here are a few memorable instances from my deployment. I was escorting workers on the Afghan Special Forces training camp. I was in a standoff with gate guards for taking pictures of signs that said no pictures. As our standoff heated up, a tall American Special Forces trainer came running up and defused the situation. He asked where I was from. When I told him Oklahoma, he laughed and asked if I knew the KING. I quickly responded, "Switzer." He told me pictures were strictly prohibited. I still have a picture of the signs. I wish I had taken his picture. He was killed a few months later by friendly fire. What a strange way to bump into Pat Tillman. Toward the end of my deployment, I was sitting in my tent when I heard a

helicopter landing. The landing pad was just across the road, so I walked out to see what was going on. Normally, it was injured soldiers being moved to Germany. This time was different. Security Forces got out and cleared the area. Then, not believing what I was seeing, Toby Keith and another guy got off the helicopter. I quickly grabbed the 4 CDs I had and walked up and asked to have them autographed. He put his arm around me and said, "Here is one of my fans, take our picture". He asked if I wanted the other guy in the picture, and I said ok. He then autographed my CDs and said, "Thank you for your service". I said, "Thank you for coming out to see us." Later that night he and the other guy, who turned out to be Ted Nugent, put on an awesome concert on the back of a trailer with just two guitars. It was the first time I really heard the words to Cat Scratch Fever. I realized then it was not a



TODD ROSS

song about a cat.

I saw many things, gun battles though, not so much. I was only involved in three small skirmishes. I did hear a lot of bombing, which, at a distance, looks and sounds a lot like thunderstorms. Anytime an enemy was encountered they called in air support,

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Todd Ross and Barry Vincent



Toby Keith, Todd Ross and Ted Nugent



Todd Ross (in middle) with Todd Corbin

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which took out problems quickly. I did security escort one day a week and was an ammo handler the rest. We moved ammo from airport to storage bunker where we issued to the joint coalition. We handled all the ammo that came into the country. A lot of famous people and politicians came to visit, but since they usually just got off the plane, performed or shook hands at the airport, and then got right back on the plane and left, I didn't get to meet a lot of them. I only went to the airport when ammo came in. I did, however, get to meet a few that came out to our camp like R. Lee Ermey and Jim Inhofe.

Upon my return in August 2004, we had a big ceremony in OKC, where I was reunited with my family and could finally go home. We had a small ceremony at Heart in the Park, where we took down the yellow ribbon. I presented both NOC and THS with flags that had been certified flown in Afghanistan. The college has theirs displayed in their library, which makes me proud and feel like I did the right thing. I then transferred to Perry to get in a unit for which I was MOS qualified. They were forward observers for artillery. August 29, 2005, I got my second call to active duty to respond to Hurricane Katrina. We would leave for New Orleans the next morning, stopping at Ft. Polk for briefing on the security detail we were taking on. It was a strange feeling, carrying a loaded M4 on US soil looking for bad guys. Forty-Five hot smelly days later we returned home. I then transferred back to the Tonkawa unit. My final call was for a natural disaster in Oklahoma. We took two large generators to Locust Grove to get their water plant online. They treated us very well. We stayed for three weeks until they got electric on.

I retired from the US ARMY and Oklahoma National Guard September 2011 with the following: Army Commendation Medal, 2 Reserve Components Commendation Medals, National Defense Service Medal, Global War on Terrorism Expeditionary Medal, Armed Forces Reserve Medal with M Device, Combat Action Badge, Louisiana Emergency Management Service Medal, Humanitarian Service Medal, 9 Oklahoma National Guard Good Conduct Ribbons, Army Service Ribbon, Overseas Service Bar, Rifle M-16 (Marksman), Grenade (Expert).

I don't want to glamorize my service, so I will point out that close to thirty innocent children died during combat operations while I was in Afghanistan. I saw people who had been killed senselessly in New Orleans while we searched for the killers. They were the real reason rescue efforts were delayed. If I learned anything from my travels, Tonkawa is a great place to live. My family, friends, and community supported me beyond words. While I was in Afghanistan, Blubaugh Insurance heard we couldn't get toilet paper, so they sent me a case. My Col. said, "We knew you were full of it Ross; this proves it!" Misty Bess's 2nd grade class and Cheryl Lane's class from Red Rock wrote me letters. I could go on and on about my experiences, but I would like to close and point out that my kids are the true heroes, putting up with me being deployed and by thanking everyone for their support.

Honoring those who served:

Sgt. Joe Durbin

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Sgt. Joseph Durbin:

I spent one tour of duty in Iraq and one in Afghanistan. I served as an infantry team leader in Iraq and an infantry squad leader in Afghanistan. I was awarded the Combat Action Badge, the Combat Infantryman Badge, four Army Commendation Medals, four Army Achievement Medals, Active Duty Good Conduct Medal, the Oklahoma National

Guard Good Conduct Medal, the Sharp Shooter Rifle Qualification, Expert Pistol Qualification, and many other awards and ribbons, but the ones I listed seem the most significant. I guarded the White House and Washington monuments as part of Operation Noble Eagle while on active duty. I also went to New Orleans for Hurricane Katrina, where I earned a Humanitarian Service Medal. I really don't have a story to tell, at least not one that I feel up to sharing, but I would like to say that yes, a soldier fights for his or her country, but ultimately soldiers fight for each other because that's all we have over there. We fight for the brother or sister next to us.

Part of what we do is to insure the future of this great country and the people in her, but when you get there it boils down to the person next to you. I was fortunate to have served with great people like Paul Stokesberry, Tony Pando, and my brother, Cody Durbin. I had mentors like Mike Rhoades, Joe Zook, and Mark Combes, and I was inspired to serve my country by my Grandfather Kellie Lilburn Durbin, and my dad, Kellie Joe Durbin, who served in WW2 and the Korean War. These are the type of people that make this country great, and they remind you that being a soldier is an honor.



SGT. JOSEPH DURBIN

Honoring those who served:

David Schatz

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David Schatz

I graduated from Spartan School of Aeronautics in 1970 with A&P certification. In 1972, I joined the Air Force Reserves as a Weapons Systems Specialist. After tech training, I was back-seat qualified in the F 105s and

Weapons Crew Chief on F4-C Phantoms. I competed in several red flag TDY (temporary additional duties) which are the same as the Navy Top Gun. I had two overseas TDY tours, one to Italy and one to England, with NATO forces. In 1984, I transferred to the Missouri National Guard unit in Springfield, Missouri, maintaining Black Hawk and Huey aircraft for the 1107th AVCAD. I did three tours to Belgium with NATO forces.

In 1990, my guard unit was deployed in support of the 1107th

C-23 medium cargo aircraft. Almost immediately I found myself on my way to Desert Shield as support crew for the military aircraft assigned to Kuwait. When we arrived in Cairo, Egypt, we were detained by the government while paperwork was thoroughly checked and verified. It seems a red flag went up because we were aboard military aircraft coming through Egypt on United States government paperwork. We were detained there for nine days, and it was apparent that our accommodations in the hotel were searched regularly. When we went out to the plane, it wasn't unusual for the armed guards at the airport to train their weapons on us as though expecting to have to engage. Once we were cleared to leave Cairo, we arrived in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, and had a two-day layover. We were required to have a gas mask in readiness at all times and even experienced a scud missile attack while there.

Our home base in the Middle East was in Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirates, where we stayed for several months, with



DAVID SCHATZ

one month in Safwan, Iraq. We were responsible for flying supplies to forward operating bases at night, landing on highways. We flew over the Kuwait fires many times. Those fires were quite a sight to see. With all the smoke and ash from the fires, our aircraft came back from every mission almost black. It became a daily job to wash and clean the aircraft. My brother, Mike, was in Desert Storm with the Marines

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David Schatz on flight line

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at the same time I was there. A year after our tours were over, we shared our photos. It turned out that he had a picture of an airplane flying over the fires, and I had a picture looking down at the fires from the same plane he had photographed. I had taken the picture from the same plane my brother photographed from the ground.

After returning from Kuwait in 1991, I had several TDYs to Guatemala, Honduras, and Panama under the military contract supporting DEA operations as well as Special Forces operations. In 2003, I was deployed to serve in Operation Iraqi Freedom with the Guards. I was in both Kuwait and Iraq, primarily Kuwait. For this deployment, I was attached to Company I 185 Aviation Brigade. Temperatures in the desert area ran around 120 degrees, so most missions were flown at night. During one daylight convoy in Iraq, our vehicle was at the end, following a number of military vehicles. The lead vehicles were attacked by small arms fire. Luckily, no one was injured in the attack.

During operation Iraqi Freedom in 2007, I was once again deployed, this time with Company F 207th Aviation Brigade, to Balad Air Base in Iraq, which was about sixty miles from the border with Iran and about an hour from Baghdad. My first day there was spent under the table in the mess hall during a rocket attack. I soon found that this was a regular, almost daily occurrence. I became accustomed to eating many meals while sitting under the mess tables. All of our planes suffered some kind of battle damage while there, whether from direct hits from enemy fire or from shrapnel from the bombs and missiles. One airplane was so badly damaged that it was considered a total loss.

Between the frequent sand storms and the constantly burning fire pit, there was a continual haze over the base. All the trash on the base was burned in the fire pit, so along with the haze was the ever-present odor of whatever trash was burning that day. Before long, we became accustomed to the stench and the haze and really didn't notice it.

I am proud to have retired from the military, and I am honored to have served as a contractor with the Missouri National Guard for twenty years.

Honoring those who served:

James Bradley Esch

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James Bradley Esch

I graduated from Tonkawa High School in 1986 and spent that summer on a harvest crew with Wally and Wilma Schatz. We returned just in time for the beginning of the NOC semester. I enlisted in the United States Marine Corps February 3rd, 1987, just before my 19th birthday. I was still attending NOC at the time and was due to ship with Todd Case that summer. He talked me into going with him, and I figured it couldn't be any harder than going on harvest with Wally Schatz. When the time came to ship, Todd delayed so he could go on another harvest, and I left for MCRD San Diego July 27th, 1987.

MCRD was about what I expected, lots of yelling, physical training, and long classes on how to be a Marine. I finished boot

camp as a squad leader and the rank of PFC. I went to Camp Johnson for training as Unit Diary Clerk in Jacksonville, North Carolina. I spent my first Thanksgiving and Christmas away from home there and graduated January 22, 1988 with orders to 1st Battalion, 3rd Marines, at Kaneohe Bay, Hawaii. I reported for duty February 19th after taking leave in Tonkawa. Five of us all were rushed through the reception center together. It normally takes a week, but we were there about 12 hours checking in and taking classes. When we got to our company, they threw me in a room with a Sergeant and a Corporal from our scout sniper platoon, and I was told not to unpack anything because we were leaving for Okinawa on Monday. I got 48 hours in Hawaii and was on a Flying Tiger headed to Camp Hansen.

I spent six months in Okinawa, three of which were in Air Contingency Battalion (stand by for anything happening in the region). We returned to Hawaii in September 1988. The following August, we were right back on

another deployment. The second deployment went fast. I was selected to get on a ship and go to the Philippines (PI) for ten days, then get on another ship and go to Australia, then back to Okinawa. Nothing ever goes as planned. We arrived in PI, unloaded our gear, and the following night there was an attempted coup. We were the largest infantry unit there and called to support the Marine Barracks with Embassy Security. That second ship that had the rest of our unit on it circled PI for two weeks before coming into port, but I was stuck in the Philippines I for three months. I flew back to Okinawa three days before we shipped back to Hawaii.

We were always doing some type of training. In August of 1990, we were on the Big Island doing training for a month when we were called back. We were only on our second week, and they were in a big hurry to get us back. I actually flew over on an Oklahoma NG C130 and flew back on a CH 53 Super Stallion. We were then told what was happening in Kuwait, and they sent us to every gun range we could



JAMES BRADLEY ESCH

put lead on. I fired everything but the mortars. Our entire battalion flew to Saudi Arabia on September 5th.

We arrived at the Port and offloaded our MPF ships. I was moved from duties as a Unit Diary Clerk to a Heavy Machine Gun team. We moved out after three days at the port and were within a mile of the Kuwait border for the rest of the time prior to the ground war. We would do

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patrols and set up small firing ranges every now and then. Time went slowly, nights were cold and days were hot. From a distance, camels looked like people at night. Being on a gun team meant we were outer security/OP. We had a 50 caliber M2 machine gun and an MK-19 grenade launcher on our vehicle. We always did everything in twos. When we patrolled, we left two men at the position, and the other two went on patrol.

One day, we got a call that they needed me at the Battalion Headquarters ASAP. They didn't give any reason, so I grabbed the PFC on the team, grabbed our gear and walked the mile back to headquarters. I thought I had done something, since they asked for me by name. When we arrived, the company Gunny told me to report to the Sgt. Maj. I just knew I was in trouble. I reported to the Sgt. Maj., and he had a barber's kit on his desk, said that he heard I could cut a "good high and tight", and that he and the Col. needed a haircut before they left for an MEF meeting. I was a little nervous cutting their hair.

I was involved in the battle of Khafji, and we were close enough to the coast that we could see the USS Missouri firing those big guns. It was an awesome site. The night the air war started I was sitting on watch. I could see all the lights of the aircraft behind me. We had heard on the radio that President Bush had given Saddam a deadline, and it was up. The planes got above me, and all the lights went out. About fifteen minutes later, we could see all the fireworks across the border. About thirty minutes after that, we were in chemical suits due to the alarms going off, MOPP Level 4 the rest of the night. There were many nights like that; they would fire artillery our way, and we would fire back and kill them.

During the ground war, I was part of TF King, Taro, Ripper, and Warden. I have no idea which one was which; it was all just a big blur of no sunlight for seventy-two hours. Just prior to going in, I took two pictures, one looking at the border, the other the opposite direction. The difference was night and day due to all the oil wells burning. Our battalion went in and secured the Kuwait Airport, and we were told to hold in place. They wanted the Saudis to be the ones that liberated Kuwait City, so we sat there and started gathering up prisoners.

We returned to Hawaii April 3, 1991. I re-enlisted for orders to Ft. Sill when we got back, but was not due to transfer until February. I was assigned to HMH-463 on the other side of the base until I was due to PCS. I didn't know life could be so easy, no daily PT, no five formations a day, just show up on time and do the work. My orders later got modified, and I left for Lawton in October.

I took thirty days leave in Tonkawa and reported for duty at Ft Sill. I was now a Corporal and close enough to come home on weekends. I was thinking about getting out; dad wanted me to help him with the farm. I came home for two weeks and ran the combine for him during harvest that summer. We had fun; it was a little different than when I was in high school. He paid me five hundred dollars before I went back to Lawton. Two weeks later, I got a call that he had been hit by a drunk driver and wasn't doing well. I took me about forty-five minutes to drive from Lawton to Tonkawa, but he had passed away. I was twenty-four then, and I was meritoriously promoted to Sergeant and decided to stay in another four years when the time came. I left for MCAS at Cherry Point, North Carolina, in September 1994.

I spent six years at Cherry Point. I met my wife Tracey there, and she tagged along for the rest of my career. I was with Headquarters Squadron four years, then I was promoted to Staff Sergeant, and I got my own office at VMA-542. This was a harrier squadron and everything revolved around flights. In June of 2000, I was transferred to Weapons Company, 1st Battalion, 23rd Marines at Austin, Texas. The following year, everything changed. First, Dale Earnhardt hit the wall in turn three at Daytona; then a bunch of terrorists hijacked planes and flew them into buildings on 9/11. Things changed at the unit; we began training the reservists and waiting for activation. Everyone was stuck where they were due to a stop loss: all orders were cancelled. I had orders to Okinawa, Japan, for an accompanied tour of three years. Since my replacement had already executed his orders and was on his way to Austin, I was allowed to transfer to 3rd FSSG at Camp Kinser, Japan.

We enjoyed our time there. Our kids liked the schools, and I got to go on a few deployments to Korea every now and then. I kept trying to get on the MEU and go over to the sand box, but it never worked out. I did do a humanitarian mission for the tsunami relief in Sri Lanka for a couple of months. I was a Gunnery Sergeant by that time, and the TO always called for a Staff Sergeant. Knowing my chances for promotion without additional combat were going to be close to nil, I asked for and received orders to Broken Arrow, Oklahoma, with TOW Company, which allowed Tracey and the kids to move into the Esch homestead house on the corner while I went back and forth to Tulsa for a year. Best of all, we don't ever plan to move again!

I put in my request for retirement in November of 2006. I was set for retirement in September 2007. While I was there, I took a platoon to Morocco for training in April, then I went on terminal leave in June of 2007. I started working for Tharp Cattle Company while on leave, and still help him today. In December of 2007, I became a volunteer fireman with Tonkawa Fire Department, and a year later I started full time.

My awards over the 20 years, 1 month and 3 days of active duty, include: Navy and Marine Corps Commendation Medal X2, Joint Service Achievement Medal, Navy and Marine Corps Achievement Medal X 4, Combat Action Ribbon, Joint Meritorious Unit Award, Navy Unit Commendation, Navy Meritorious Unit Commendation, Marine Corps Good Conduct Medal X 6, National Defense Service Medal, Southwest Asia Service Medal X 3, Global War on Terrorism Service Medal, Korean Defense Service Medal, Sea Service Deployment Ribbon X 6, Kuwait Liberation Medal (Saudi Arabia) and Kuwait Liberation Medal (Kuwait).

If you asked me what we did in the Marine Corps, I would tell you we killed people and broke things. At the Fire Department we save lives and protect property.

Honoring those who served:

Mike Schatz

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to report for active duty on 29 NOV 1990 and to report to their site of initial assignment, Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, by 01 DEC 1990. Two Corpsmen and 212 deployable Marines reported for active duty.

Upon arrival at Camp Lejeune, Battery F joined 3rd Battalion, 10th marines, 2nd Marine division with three other Active duty Marine Firing Batteries. Fox Battery vigorously set about the tasks required to deploy to Southwest Asia. Fox Marines received additional training in the areas of survival, chemical warfare, familiarization with enemy weapons, and additional occupational skills training and in one skill that would prove invaluable, the Night Moves. Schatz and Green taught a lot of these hands-on topics, which also included Emergency First Aid, CPR, ground and air evacuation techniques, and the use of auto-injectors to be used in the event of chemical casualties.

On 01 JAN 91 Fox Battery arrived at Al Jaber, Saudi Arabia, after a twenty-two hour flight and readied for what lay ahead. The first experiences in the Saudi

Desert were not pleasant ones for the "Sooner" Marines. It was nothing like the stateside terrain they had trained on. Even the desert training at Twentynine Palms, California, was a different environment. The sands of the "SABKHAS" gave way like quicksand under the weight of the 5-ton trucks and towed howitzers. Many hours were spent digging out and recovering vehicles and guns. When not helping with recovery efforts, Schatz and Green navigated the vast desert to coordinate care and supplies from the constant location changes of the Battalion Aid Station.

The first movement north of the training areas was in an area called the "Triangle," and the desert showed Fox Battery a new trick: forty hours of rain followed immediately by sand storm. Schatz and Green divided the six gun Battery in half, each taking three guns, the FDC, transportation and supply sections. They trained tirelessly with the Marines as well as making sure everyone was physically and mentally prepared for what lay ahead. The battery next moved south for a



Mike Schatz' with the 5 ton truck and TOW anti-tank gun.

final test firing of all its weapons. The next few days were tense as the ground war deadline given by President Bush to withdraw from Kuwait approached. The air war started, and the battery prepared to move north again. During the movement, Fox Battery found themselves passing through elements of the 1st Marine Division. Their destination was near Kabrit; the "Sooner" Marines became part of the tip of the spear.

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The training and readiness preparations continued with ever increasing intensity. Enemy activity was also increasing, and a rapid movement to the north was ordered in the middle of the night. Fox battery, along with the other three batteries, was placed in a reinforcing role with the Tiger Brigade of the US ARMY to thwart any Iraqi penetration into the zone of action. The battery was fire capable by first light. After several tense nights, the battalion was moved farther north to defensive positions within ten miles of the border and placed in a direct support role.

Because of increased enemy activity across the border, the battalion was ordered to conduct an artillery raid on Iraqi positions. It was the largest artillery raid to date, and the "Sooner" Marines were the first reserve artillery unit to engage the enemy. The movement into the raid positions was a difficult one. It was a cloudy, moonless night that made navigation extremely treacherous. The battery occupied positions, engaged targets, and displaced before the Iraqi forces could mount a counter-fire threat. Of the four firing batteries, Fox was the only battery to occupy the correct position and engage targets. The "Sooner" Marines then moved within six miles of the border, and the impenetrable wall Saddam Hussain had built. It was their final defensive position.

The next mission came the day before the ground war started when it became clear several Iraqi positions had to be cleared to allow occupation of attack positions inside Kuwait. The battery moved to within 2500 meters of the border to provide artillery support for clearing the wall. The "Sooner" Marines pounded the Iraqi positions with accurate and timely fire that neutralized several positions, one tank and several armored vehicles, and forced the surrender of over 300 enemy prisoners of war at the Battle of UMM Gudair. The night before the ground war started, the wall was breached, and the battery assumed its attack positions deep inside Kuwait and readied for H-hour. Again, Fox Battery was the first Field Artillery unit inside Kuwait. G-day (Ground attack day) began the next morning. When daylight arrived, the battery found itself amidst an enemy bunker complex with a neutralized artillery battery nearby. The battery calmly and professionally went about the business of clearing and securing the complex and gathering intelligence material from the Iraqi positions.

The next twenty-four hours will long be remembered as "Hell Night" by the Marines and Corpsmen of Battery F. The battery continued to support the next phase of the attack from its position in the bunker complex by firing counter-fire targets and on-call missions. The "Sooner" Marines, Marines Recon, and Advanced Party moved forward of the Infantry to secure their next position. The Infantry was moving so fast that the battery had to move ahead of them to give them the artillery support they needed. As the day progressed, the sky became black with smoke from the hundreds of burning oil wells. Visibility dropped to less than a few meters in the eerie darkness. Flashlights were necessary to read maps at midday. Members of the Advanced Party occupied and secured a position well forward along the axis of the advance. The rapid advance of the mechanized infantry and extreme night-like darkness resulted in by-passing several pockets of enemy resistance. A tank battle erupted 400 meters to the front of the Advance Party. Several incoming mortar rounds impacted their flank. TOW (Tube-launched, Optically tracked, Wire-guided) anti-tank vehicles and tanks engaged to the rear of the Advanced Party. With friendly and enemy fire crossing their position, the "Sooner" Marines held their ground, knowing that occupation of that position by the main body was essential in providing adequate fire support.

The Battery's main body was ordered to displace just prior to evening. In the darkness, flashlights were barely visible. The battery maneuvered through twelve kilometers of terrain filled with enemy bunkers and trench lines with only blackout drive tail markers on the rear of each vehicle. The battery completed the movement that many thought couldn't be completed successfully and was fire capable in 2 1/2 hours. During the night, the Iraqi's mounted a sizable counter attack. Over forty armored vehicles, ten trucks and numerous Infantry soldiers were destroyed by Fox Battery. The battery engaged targets on three azimuths (compass direction) of fire to cover the whole regimental frontage (most fire missions are one or two azimuths of fire). In order for Schatz to get to the gun line to treat an injured Marine, he followed commo (telephone) wire from his vehicle to the FDC and then followed one of three wires to the gun battery where the Marine had injured his knee and was unable to help load rounds for the gun. Schatz took up the Marine's position on the gun crew once he established that the Marine was stable. The following morning, they realized they were the only one of four batteries in the Battalion to make the night move successfully. When the enemy Battle Damage Assessment was reported, they also realized they had played a major role in defeating a major Iraqi counter attack. Fox Battery was a key factor in the Battle of Al Jaber Airfield.

Even though they had not slept, Fox Battery's next move was to occupy a position overlooking Kuwait City. Once they secured

and occupied that position, they received new orders: "ALL UNITS CEASE OFFENSIVE OPERATIONS AND HOLD CURRENT POSITIONS. A short time later the US flag was raised over the US Embassy in Kuwait City. The "Sooner" Marines held that defensive position until 15 JUN 91.

During combat operations, both Corpsmen Schatz and Green took extra care in assuring that the Marines of Fox Battery received the highest level of medical care, which included daily evaluations of the men, monitoring field kitchen operations, providing treatment for sick Marines during sick-call, suturing lacerations, extra training in NBC operations, desert survival and heat casualty treatment, field sanitation and personal hygiene classes for the desert environment. Both Corpsmen were also involved in assessment and treatment/referral of mental health issues. During the cessation of operation until the battery left Kuwait, Schatz and Green established physical and dental exams with medical/dental units in Kuwait city and volunteered as lifeguards at an olympic size swimming pool at an R&R center for out-of-country workers, the results of which had a major impact on the morale of the marines under their care.

Petty Officer 1st Class Schatz, and Petty Officer 2nd Class Green received the Navy and Marine Corps Commendation Medals.

Honoring those who served:

Byfield Gordon

(Editor's Note: The following feature is a series of profiles that will honor war era veterans from Tonkawa. The bulk of the work and research was completed by Mike Schatz, edited by Ginger Hunter and proof reader Judy Robinson.)

Byfield Gordon

When Mike Schatz asked for information about Tonkawa alumni who served in a country with which the U.S. was at war, he received replies from a few individuals new to his list of Tonkawa soldiers. Byfield Gordon is one of those. He served in WWII, Korea and Viet Nam. He is a member of the class of 1938, and he worked at the greenhouse his parents owned in Tonkawa. The family lived in the two-story house next to the greenhouse, just east of what is now Simple Simon's. While attending NOJC, Gordon's National Guard Unit was activated for Federal duty. During WWII, Gordon flew on three beach heads: Salerno Italy, Anzio, and Southern France. Now ninety-five years old, Gordon recently visited Tonkawa and

learned of the military project the Alumni Association is sponsoring. As a result, he met with Principal Kyle Simpson and later sent the following account of his thirty-one year military career to Simpson.

I was activated along with 177 others who belonged to the 189th Field Artillery Battery of the 45th Division. We left Tonkawa in September 1940, and reported to Ft. Sill. After six months, we moved to Abilene, Texas, where I submitted a request for aviation cadet training. I graduated as a 2nd Lieutenant with pilot wings. My first duty station was Tarrant field, Fort Worth, Texas, learning to fly the B-24 Liberator, a heavy bomber. From there, I transferred to Tucson Air Base to start combat flight training. After six months training, my crew and I flew to England to join the 8th Air Force, which was stationed in Benghazi, Libya. The 8th joined the 9th on a bombing mission to Ploesti, Romania. We were 188 strong. Ploesti's huge oil production facility supported the entire enemy force, so the destruction of the facility was vital to the

war. Our bombers were spotted by the enemy early, so the mission was not a complete success. In most cases, bombers flew unescorted by fighters because they did not have the range of the B-24. Eighty-eight bombers and ten men were lost on the mission.

After the mission, the 8th needed the B-24 bombers but not the crew, so the crew members were dispersed to the 9th and 376th Bomber Groups in Africa, and the B-24s were sent back to England. I was assigned to the 376th group and sent on missions to Italy, Greece, Austria, and Crete. On Thanksgiving Day 1943, I was transferred to San Prancazio, Italy. Germany, Bulgaria, France, Rumania, and Yugoslavia became new targets, and I became the Group Lead Pilot. I was promoted to Group Operations Officer for the four squadrons for my last six months of combat duty.

Every mission was a thriller; some worse than others. The day I was dispatched to Anzio beachhead, the weather was bad. The beachhead was under threat of being lost to the enemy, and the



BYFIELD GORDON

Air Force sent bombers to the rescue. I was leading eighteen aircraft, and the Formation Commander, a full Colonel on his first combat mission, was in the right seat. We were scheduled to drop bombs 20,000 feet from our target -- ammo and enemy emplacements in mountains 12,000 feet above the beachhead. Because of the weather, we had to descend

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189th Artillery Headquarters Battery

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to maintain visual flight rules. We arrived at 12,000 feet above water with Anzio in sight. I put the formation in a large 360 degree turn and asked the Colonel what he thought we should do. He said, 'You have more experience than I do, what do you think we should do?' I replied, 'Colonel, you just made the decision; we are going in.' The 45th Infantry was on the beach, and I had a lot of friends down there I wanted to help. The weather was not good at all; the visibility was poor. We had been briefed to stay away from a railroad track because the enemy had portable flak on it. I called the navigator and told him to take us right down that track. The track led us to our target. We were severely peppered, receiving plenty of holes, but arrived on target without any casualties, which was a miracle. The next day, the 376th Bombardment Group (H) was credited with saving the beachhead. The Colonel received the Silver Star, and I received the Distinguished Flying Cross. We were the only bomb group to hit the target that day.

On my 49th mission, we lost 6 of our 18 bombers to 109 enemy fighters. Over my target at Gurgu, Yugoslavia, on the Danube, I took flak in my left leg. I made it back to base and recovered in time for my 50th mission. By then it was July 1944 and time to go home. I flew my "war-weary" B-24 to the U.S. loaded with returnees. I was released from the Army Air Corps and returned to Tonkawa to work with my father in the greenhouse.

I was recalled to active duty in 1951 to fly a C-119 troop carrier during Korea. We were stationed in Japan at Ashiya Air Base on Kyushi, the southern island of Japan. Our mission ran twenty-four hours -night and day - flying supplies and equipment in support of the front line troops. I flew into Viet Nam twice. The French needed our C-119 aircraft to supply an isolated garrison surrounded by heavily armed Viet Cong. The only way to reach was by air, so we trained French pilots to fly our C-119s. The second time I was there was to train Chinese pilots to fly the C-119 after the French turned the supply problem over to the Chinese.

Among my duties state-side, I am especially proud of being Officer-in-Charge of ground, missile, and explosive safety in Air Training Command. The command had sixteen bases, and during the four years I was in charge, we saved \$1.4 million in accident safety. I was also Director of Interservice Nuclear Weapons School at Kirtland, Air Force Base in Albuquerque, New Mexico. The school had six highly classified courses providing top secret data to high ranking government and civilian personnel. It was my final assignment, lasting 4 1/2 years. I feel strongly that God guided my actions throughout my service, and He still is.



Honoring those who served:

Bennie Joe Dennis Olmstead

(Editor's Note: The following feature is a series of profiles that will honor war era veterans from Tonkawa. The bulk of the work and research was completed by Mike Schatz, edited by Ginger Hunter and proof reader Judy Robinson.)

Bennie Joe Dennis Olmstead

After I graduated from high school in 1984, I spent the summer hauling hay for Joe Brining. Joe saw that I needed some direction about what to do with my life, so he hooked me up with Don Pendleton, and in June, 1984, I joined the Oklahoma National Guard, SVC BTRY 1/189 Field Artillery. It was a good move for me.

I went to Ft. Leonard Wood, Missouri, for boot camp. It was hard at times, like getting up for grass drill at 2 A.M and again at 4 A. M for "wake-up." After Ft. Leonard Wood, the Guards sent me to Ft. Lee, Virginia. When I came home, I went to the oil patch for a few years and then to harvest with J. C. Ward. We followed his route from Tonkawa to Shelby, Montana, and I stayed

there for a while to work for some farmers. I learned to drive an 18-wheeler and decided to stay and join the Shelby National Guard, D Company 2 Cav BN 163rd AR Bde. About eight months later, I returned to Oklahoma, moved to Enid, and started working for Singer Steel as a saw operator.

At summer camp with SVC Batt 1/189 Field Artillery, I met with Lt. Mugg, whom I knew, and told him that if they were taking volunteers, I would like to volunteer for service in Iraq. I knew I was taking a chance on ever coming back, but I didn't think I had anything to lose; I didn't feel like I had much going for me, so I didn't care. I also wanted to know if the things I had learned in the last six years would pay off, and they did. I received my orders for active duty as a cannon crewmember November 21st, 1990 with Battery C, 1st Battalion 158th Field Artillery MLRS (Multiple Launch Rocket System). The mobilization point was Ft. Sill, where I joined the Chickasha-Marlow-Duncan group. We left the U.S. from Altus Air Force Base for

active duty in Iraq. Fifty-two of us went ahead of the rest, and we landed at King Fahd International Airport, Dammam, Saudi Arabia, and from there we went to Khobar Village, also known as Daharan. We spent the first night at Tent City. From there, we traveled 300 miles north to engage the enemy (see note below). It was 125 degrees when we left there. I saw my share of dead bodies, burned and blown up, and boys fighting junk, but I did not kill anybody.

On August 24th, 1991, we were released from active duty. I spent fourteen and a half years in the Army. I had planned on twenty, but I hurt my lower back while on duty, and the doctor said I wouldn't be able to run, do push-ups and sit-ups. He was right; when 9/11 happened, I wanted to go but couldn't.

My MOS (military occupation specialty) in the army includes 76W Petroleum Supply, 13B20 Ammo Canon Crewmember, 882M20 Truck Driver, and 11H20 Heavy Anti-Armor WPN (Weapons) Infantry. I received the Army Service Ribbon; National Defense Medal, 1st Award;

Southwest Asia Service Medal; W/2 Bronze Service Stars; and The Army Achievement Medal. From the Oklahoma National Guard, I received the Desert Storm Service Medal; Good Conduct Ribbon, 1st, 2nd, 4th, 7th; Long Service Ribbon, 5 year and 10 year; and the Army Reserve Components Achievement Medal 3rd Award. I still drive trucks. I've been driving most of my life over the road, but I've slowed down a lot. I've had a lot of good folks help me along the way, and I want to thank you all and God bless you all.

Note from the 158th Field Artillery Association: By the time the 1st Battalion, 158th Field Artillery came together in the Saudi Desert, the ground offensive of Desert Storm was only days away. On 21 November, 1990, the 1st Bn 158th FA (MLRS) was mobilized for deployment to Saudi Arabia in support of Operation Desert Shield. The battalion moved to Ft. Sill on November. On 15 January, 1991; an advance party of 90 soldiers from

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the 1/158th FA and the 1045th Maintenance left Fort Sill for Saudi Arabia. On 4 February, the unit conducted a 12 hour road march conveying their wheeled vehicles to TAA Hawg, 18 km north of Hafar al Batin. Their tracked vehicles had still not arrived in-country. The rest of the battalion's launchers finally made port on the 16th and were unloaded at Dammam. The launchers and M577s of "C" battery were loaded on Heavy Equipment Trailers (HETs) and driven north to TAA Hawg, arriving on 18 February. Advance parties from "B" and "C" batteries went north to join "A" battery on the following day. The main body of the battalion made the 60 km move north to its forward assembly area on the 20th. Two days later, four days after they had received their launchers, "B" and "C" Batteries launched raids against Iraqi targets. Bravo fired 42 rockets on 6 targets at 1310 on 22 February. Charlie fired 25 rockets on 3 assigned targets. On 24 February, Charlie received a fire mission from the 75th FA Brigade and launched 11 rockets. The MLRS Battalion along with the 1045Missile Maintenance Detachment proved that the National Guard was capable of fielding the most sophisticated artillery system in the world.

Honoring those who served:

Matthew Dale Schatz

(Editor's Note: The following feature is a series of profiles that will honor war era veterans from Tonkawa. The bulk of the work and research was completed by Mike Schatz.)

Matthew Dale Schatz

My family has a long and honorable military heritage. Cpl. Hiram T. Smith rode with Captain Marion Whaley, 1st NE Missouri Cavalry Regiment during the Civil War. He was my third-great-grandfather and the reason several members of the Schatz family are members of the "Sons of Confederate Veterans Camps" in Missouri and Oklahoma. He served with honor and was captured and executed in what is now known as the Palmyra Massacre in Palmyra, Missouri. During WWII, my great-grandfather, Matous Kupilik, was with the Austrian Army and fought in Europe; three great uncles fought in the European and Pacific Theaters of Operation, and my grandfather, DeOrval Schatz, flew in the Army Air Corps. My dad, Mike Schatz, served in the Marines in Viet Nam as well as

with the Army and Navy in other conflicts. His brothers, David and Dale, also served; David in South West Asia and Dale, a Marine veteran, served in Viet Nam. My brother Mike served in the Air Force, and I was with the Oklahoma National Guard when we deployed to Afghanistan. Jeff Schatz (son of David) served in the U.S. Army. Needless to say, when I told my dad and relatives I wanted to join the Oklahoma National Guards, I had their full support, even knowing I would probably be assigned a tour in South West Asia.

Most high school juniors and seniors were making plans for graduating and going to college, but I wanted to serve my country by joining the military first. My dad encouraged me to talk to several recruiters to see what branch, or MOS, I wanted before I enlisted. Even though I was seventeen, the final decision was up to me. Because I was still a junior, I had to wait until graduation.

Immediately after graduation in May 2007, I enlisted in the Oklahoma Army National Guard unit in Ponca City, as did several

of my classmates. I received Basic Infantry training at Ft. Benning, Georgia. When I graduated as Infantryman (11B), my parents drove to Georgia to attend the ceremony. I was assigned as a rifleman for the Delta Company "War Dogs," 179th Infantry, 45th Brigade in Ponca City. I continued training until December 7th, 2007 and made it home just in time for Christmas. I was later able to enroll in a higher education program with the help of my VA benefits, and I completed two degrees from Northern Oklahoma College. During that time, I also married Raven Shear.

In March of 2011, the government activated my unit with the 45th and placed us on orders for a 2011-2012 deployment to Afghanistan. We rode buses to Camp Shelby, Mississippi, for training. On completion, we took flights to Alingar, located in Laghman Province between Mehtar and Kalagush. My unit was divided, and I was with 1st Platoon. We were plagued with sparse living conditions: no running water, primitive toilets, and three week return delivery of



MATTHEW DALE SCHATZ

mail. We did not have computer contact with our families until our deployment was almost over. We were on an isolated mission compared to others. We subsisted on MREs until an interpreter helped us buy a cow. We had to follow local customs to prepare it for slaughter with a knife and all the appropriate ceremony. We had little in the way of cooking utensils but made do, even using coffee pots to help cook the animal. It was worth it.

On November 11, 2011, two of our vehicles were on the road when the front vehicle was hit with an IED. It had a command detonation wire, which means

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someone manually set off the explosion. It happened right in front of our eyes, and there were significant injuries. We all helped with the injured; I carried a private out and helped him to the Medivac. Nothing is glamorous about war.

On the 10th anniversary of the 9/11 bombing, I finally had leave to go home. Just a few days after arriving, my dad called early one morning to say my mother had died in her sleep. It was an emotional Christmas. My leave was extended one week. It was all a blur and just sped by. I returned to Afghanistan and continued my tour until April 2012 when we were shipped home. I re-enlisted for another year with the National Guard, and during that time (May 2013) an F-5 tornado hit Moore, Oklahoma. The governor declared a natural disaster and activated Delta Company. We responded to Moore to help residents piece their lives back together.

I completed my contract with the Oklahoma Army National Guard and was discharged on March 7th, 2014. I currently live in Ponca City with my wife, Raven, and daughter, Ember. I can't say enough how much the support and letters from Raven, friends and family in Tonkawa meant to me and members of my unit, and I want to take this opportunity to thank everyone who supported our troops during this difficult time. The memories of my military service will always be with me as well as the love and support from friends and family.

Honoring those who served:

Jerry Pat Houser

(Editor's Note: The following feature is a series of profiles that will honor war era veterans from Tonkawa. The bulk of the work and research was completed by Mike Schatz.)

Jerry Pat Houser

Mike Schatz recently received a letter from a Viet Nam Veteran who was unable to send his information for the 2014 series of articles honoring THS Alumni Veterans. The following is from Chief Master Sergeant Jerry Pat Houser, United States Air Force (Ret.). Houser flew on a C-130A SPECTRE GHOSTRIDER.

I graduated from Tonkawa High School in 1960 and attended Northern Oklahoma Junior College in 1961. In April 1961, I enlisted in the US Air Force. I joined with my good friend Jerry Bellinghausen "Job," also of Tonkawa. I choose the Air Force because I liked airplanes; my brother was in the Air Force, and it seemed safer to be at 35,000 feet in the air than on the ground at 35 feet away from the enemy.

Our first stop after enlisting was Basic Training in San Antonio, Texas, at Lackland Air Force

Base. Job and I were assigned to the same training flight for twelve weeks. Initially, I wished I were back in Tonkawa, but we made it through together. After Basic Training, we attended technical school for specialized training. This is where Job and I went our separate ways throughout our careers. I attended training in Wichita Falls, Texas, to attain designation as a C-130 aircraft mechanic. Job went to Amarillo, Texas to work on B-52 bombers. We did not meet again until 1987.

In November 1961, I was assigned to Tachikawa, Japan, to the 815th Troop Carrier Squadron (TCS/C-130). From my staging base in Tachikawa in 1962, I received my initial assignment into Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. Although my home base for the next five years was Japan, most of my time was spent in Southeast Asia serving in the war.

Some of the key historical events during those five years occurred while I was on missions in the Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia theaters. In 1963, I was present for the protest against the

Saigon Catholic government and President Diem. The Buddhist monks protested in a shocking manner by lighting themselves on fire, sitting in the city square without showing any movement or suffering as they burned. In November 1963, despite this incredible showing by the Buddhist the situation remained dire. President Diem was assassinated and his government was overthrown. The people were jubilant, and celebrations went throughout the night on Tudu Street, a major street in Saigon. I witnessed the crowds as they placed a rope around President Diem's statue, and it was pulled to the ground and destroyed.

In 1964, I experienced a harrowing personal event. As we flew our mission over Vietnam, we had two of the four engines shot by ground fire and lost them. We began our return to our staging base in Japan and lost a third engine about twenty minutes out over the China Sea. Everything we had on the aircraft that wasn't attached was thrown off the aircraft in an attempt to lighten our load. The aircraft commander



JERRY PAT HOUSER

gave the order to don our parachutes. At this point, I could only think, am I really going to jump from a C-130 at night into the South China Sea? I knew my odds of success were probably one in a million, especially since it would be my first jump out of a C-130. But as luck would have it, we made it to the landing zone at Tachikawa. The aircraft commander made an unbelievable

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one engine landing. I suspect my buddy Bill Byers does not see anything special about one engine landings because that is all he had, but it is a little more exciting trying to land a four engine cargo aircraft on one engine.

Later in 1964, I was sent to Nakhon Phanom (NKP), Thailand. I was selected as part of a special unit; the Air Command Special Operations Squadron. This team was comprised of three Navy SEALs, three South Vietnamese Rangers, and three Air Force Special Ops. Our missions were flown with no military uniforms, no identification tags, and incognito. Our mission was as an extraction force into Laos and Cambodia.

In November 1965, I returned to the US and was assigned to Seward Air Force Base, Tennessee. Fifteen months later, I was reassigned. In February 1967-1968, I returned to Cam Rahn Bay, Vietnam. During this assignment, we were tasked with delivering supplies to the Marines in Hue, Vietnam. We were caught and overrun by the North Vietnamese in the 1968 TET Offensive. Thank God for the Marines and their combat experience; they saved our bacon. Hue was located on the furthest North-South border of Vietnam. It was the first site attacked.

In 1968, I returned to the states to Dover Air Force Base, Delaware. In April 1969, I was reassigned to Clark Air Force Base, Philippines, as my staging base. Our assignments would be flying into Cam Rahn Bay as our operating base. Our mission was dropping commando vault. Those were 20,000 pound bombs. The bombs were so large that only two bombs were able to fit into the C-130 cargo compartment. They were approximately the size of a UPS delivery truck. Initially, the bombs were designed to clear jungle space for helicopter landing zones. After noting their destructive capability; however, the military deemed the bombs more useful as a combat tool.

In early 1971, I returned to the US to McGuire Air Force Base, New Jersey for ten months, and then I was assigned to the 374th Tactical Airlift Wing at Ching Chuan Kang (CCK) Air Force Base in Taichung, Taiwan. CCK was the sole C-130 wing. Our mission was support and surveillance of Vietnam and surrounding areas. We were the only airlift unit in the regular operation of Southeast Asia. We flew missions into An Loc under extreme fire while doing drops. There was no protection in the aircraft from the incoming fire, so the loadmaster had the brilliant idea to fill fifty-five gallon oil drums with cargo tie-down chains to protect us (crew chiefs and loadmasters). We climbed into the drums as the only form of protection between us and the ground fire. We came to call the drums "chain coffins." I survived but lost a very good friend during this Easter Offensive of 1972 in the battle of An Loc.

Afterward, I returned to the US and served another twenty years until I retired in 1991 at McChord Air Force Base in Tacoma, Washington. Of the thirty years I served, the Southeast Asia years were the best and most gratifying. The camaraderie among my wartime buddies to accomplish our assigned missions together was priceless.

Honoring those who served:

Casey Richards

(Editor's Note: The following feature is a series of profiles that will honor war era veterans from Tonkawa. The bulk of the work and research was completed by Mike Schatz.)

Casey Richards

...as told to Mike Schatz.

Casey Richards graduated from THS in 2004 and deployed twice, once to Iraq and once to Afghanistan. While working at Asbury Machine in 2005, he joined the National Guard Unit in Ponca City because he had been thinking of signing up and had friends and classmates who joined the Ponca City unit. Although he knew going to South West Asia was a possibility, Richards didn't think about it much; it was just a part of signing up, and he knew that if he had to, he would go. Richards went to Ft. Benning, Georgia, for basic training. "Part of it was fun," he says, "but most of us were kids away from home. I learned a lot."

Richards signed up on the three and five contract offered at the time. It meant he would spend three years of drill and five years on inactive status and could be

called to active duty within the five year period if needed. In 2008, his three year duty terminated, but Richards was in Iraq by then and signed for six years, part of which covered his original five year inactive time, so he actually served nine years. He could have picked an MOS when he signed up while in Iraq, but he liked being an infantryman, and he liked his unit, Delta Company, 179th, 45th Infantry Brigade, and he is proud to be called a "War Dog."

Richards' mission during Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2007, called Detainee Operations, was to take care of Iraqi prisoners, somewhat similar to being prison guards but in a war zone instead of a prison, and the prisoners were trained soldiers. They worked out of prison barracks at Camp Buca, where they processed and held prisoners, routine work, day after day. In Afghanistan, Richards' unit could not move into barracks until everyone formed up, so they were in transit barracks and ran missions from there. The terrain and weather were nothing like the training environment, so it

was an "eye-opener."

The Afghanistan deployment during Operation Enduring Freedom was combat based, involving both convoy and foot patrol missions. At first, the missions were mostly convoy, but changed after a few months; his unit was sent from Xiohag to Bad-Pakh, "in the middle of nowhere." The 1st and 3rd were the only platoons stationed at the Tactical Operations Center at Xiohag, where they ran missions up and down Highway 7. However, theirs was the only platoon stationed at Bad-Pakh, so they stayed busy either on missions or reinforcing their position and other significant areas. Luckily, none of the vehicles in Richards' unit were hit by IEDs while on route clearance missions. However, vehicles in front of their position in the convoy were.

Richards recalls an incident that involved his friend, Cody Durbin. They were on tower duty with mountains all around them, "like being in the bottom of a bowl," and they could hear rifle shots whizzing by. Afghan military, mostly kids in uniform



CASEY RICHARDS

with rifles, were at the top of the "bowl" firing their weapons. As the gunfire got closer and closer, Richards and Durbin radioed that they were taking fire, but the TOC (officer on call) answered that the Afghans were just test firing their weapons. For the next thirty minutes or so, Richards and Durbin insisted their tower was being hit. Every time they raised their heads, they were shot at and not from test fire. Finally, the mortar section dropped ordnance on the side of the mountain. After the mortars hit, the Taliban came

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down the mountain and told the village chief to say that they were through shooting and would leave their rifles on the mountain. Later, the patrol found nothing but spent brass. "It was frustrating," Richards says, "trying to convince the duty officer it was not test fire; we were in a combat zone, taking fire."

As for support, Richards notes that there was more air support than artillery, and the choppers were aggressive and quick to answer calls. A round took out the brakes on his truck when it went through the "T" frame and hit the air supply lines. His tires locked up. The Kiowa aircraft flew back to the base to get the equipment needed to fix the truck and brought back Gatorade along with supplies. "They were great," he says. "They would put the skids on the rocks and try to draw fire; they were all about protecting the guys on the ground, and if there were anything they could do for us, consider it done."

In Iraq, Richards stood in a line with a number and waited for his turn to make a phone call. They were allowed thirty minutes per call. In Afghanistan, Richards was able to communicate with his family by telephone and computer. The food was standard MREs a lot of the time, and the cook made what he liked or what was easy, but after he transferred, the new cook tried to make three hot meals a day. "It was good," Richards remembers, "but the downside was putting on weight in a hurry if you weren't working out." In Afghanistan, getting basic supplies was complicated. Only one road was available, and it was usually closed because of IEDs or ambushes, so mail piled up and supplies were sometimes flown in, even food was air dropped. Richards recalls finding scattered golf balls, three or four buckets of them, and some clubs they used to pass the time. They also made sling-shots from heavy duty water balloons and launched "near-beer" cans over the wall. "They wouldn't let me launch a grenade," he says with a chuckle, "I tried." When asked about a good luck charm, Richards tells that his mother, a Native American, sent him a peyote button blessed by the Ponca elders.

Richards is frustrated about the present situation in South West Asia. "I read that Camp Buca, where I was, is one of the birth places of Isis. We fought a good war. Why were we there if we are just going to throw our hands in the air and give it all up?" Richards still works for Asbury Machine. He earned the Combat Infantry Badge and Army Commendation Medal for his service.

Honoring those who served:

Thomas H. Heath, Glen L. Strange, Lester T. Snow

(Editor's Note: The following feature is a series of profiles that will honor war era veterans from Tonkawa. The bulk of the work and research was completed by Mike Schatz.)

Silver Star Recipients

Tonkawa has at least three Silver Star Veterans. They are Thomas H. Heath, Glen L. Strange, and Lester T. Snow. Strange grew up in Rock Falls (Braman area) and entered the war from Tonkawa at the age of twenty-five. His military record shows him with the 9th Armored Division in 1945 and that he was a machinist before enlisting. He received a Purple Heart for wounds suffered at the Battle of the Bulge. "Old timers" will recall that he walked with a limp and the aid of a cane. Strange served as the Tonkawa Post Master for many years. Strange earned the Silver for retaking a U.S. Command Post. A press release from the War Department explains: "Outwitting the Germans during the Battle of the Ardens Bulge, [Battle of the Bulge] Captain Glen L. Strange, Infantry, of Tonkawa, Oklahoma, brought about the recapture of a

battalion command post which fell briefly into the hands of the enemy. It was in the vicinity of St. Vith, where the 27th Armored Infantry Battalion, of which Captain Strange is a member, made a gallant stand against masses of Nazi troops spearheaded by Tiger tanks. After a furious fight, the Nazis overran and captured the building in which the battalion command post had been set up. Captain Strange managed to slip through the cordon of German SS troops thrown around the CP. Eluding the army, he made contact with armored elements – the 27th is a unit of the 9th armored division – and guided a platoon of tanks back to the captured area. The tanks shot the roof off the building. Then one of the armored vehicles rumbled up to the house and the muzzle of its gun poked through a window. The Germans understood this eloquent language, and the command post was quickly returned to American hands." Strange left the Army as a Major.

Laverne Laws featured Thomas Heath in the Tonkawa News in 2013. Heath was a 1938 gradu-



LESTER T. SNOW

ate of THS and became an Army Ranger, trained to gather intelligence. He earned the Silver Star at the Battle of the Bulge while on a twenty-four hour patrol behind German lines. Heath not only obtained the information he was sent to gather but also captured a German soldier. Heath later served in Normandy with the 82nd Airborne Division and commissioned First Lieutenant in the field. Heath won the Bronze Star for Valor at Normandy Beachhead. Killed at Heartbreak Ridge in 1951, Heath is mentioned in the book *Rangers in Korea* by Robert W. Black.



THOMAS H. HEATH

LESTER T. SNOW

Lester T. Snow was born in Seiling, Oklahoma, on July 17, 1920 and moved to Tonkawa, Oklahoma with his family in 1923. He joined the Oklahoma National Guard in Tonkawa in October, 1938 while still a senior at Tonkawa High School and was attached to the HQ Btry. 189th Field Artillery Battalion at Tonkawa. He was appointed Corporal on June 1st, 1940 and to Staff Sergeant on June 1, 1942. He served in WWII in the 45th Infantry division and awarded

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the Silver Star Medal on May 12, 1944. The award was for exceptional actions taken on September 13, 1943 at Salerno, Italy. Snow's CO recommended the award "for gallantry in action," and described the incident in which he and the Battalion Executive, his radio operator, and driver "were fired upon by rifles and machine gun. Upon seeing the desperate situation the officers were in, Staff Sergeant Snow immediately and without regard for his own personal safety chose an open position on top of a hill overlooking the enemy positions and while exposed to enemy fire set up a .50 caliber machine gun and swept the terrain with fire, keeping the enemy forces close to the ground and allowing the Battalion Commander and Battalion Executive to withdraw. Staff Sergeant Snow drew the fire of the enemy, but kept up constant fire on the enemy until the two officers successfully crossed the river." Snow silenced the fire of two machine guns and a mortar and destroyed two enemy vehicles.

Snow received a battlefield commission to Second Lieutenant, effective April 13, 1944 and promoted to First Lieutenant on December 12, 1944. Snow also served as a forward observer, leader of an anti-tank section, and NCO of a mine detection platoon. After observing an attack by a low-flying plane on November 9, 1943, he realized that the .50-cal. machine gun was not adequately portable for defending in a circular radius. As he thought about the problem, he applied his creative ability to working with pieces of scrapped equipment to develop a circular mount that allowed two .50-cal. to be used in tandem and fire in a 360 degree position from either the ground or a truck. His innovation, called "Combination Mount dual .50s" was used successfully at the Anzio Beachhead and was described in the *Field Artillery Journal* of February 1945.

Upon completion of service in WWII, he returned to Tonkawa, Oklahoma, where he received a commendation from Commanding Officer Lt. Col O.T. Autry, 189th Field Artillery Battalion, Oklahoma National Guard. On April 12, 1948, he was promoted to Captain. He served in the Oklahoma National Guard and was called up for service in the Korean conflict, but severe health issues caused him to return to Oklahoma without serving in Korea. He was honorably discharged on April 9, 1952. During his service in the 45th Infantry, he received the following medal ribbons identifying the military actions in which he served: European-African-Middle Eastern Campaign Medal Ribbon (a.k.a. European Theater of War) with attachments of three bronze star devices (service stars), one silver star device (for five bronze service stars), and one bronze arrowhead device, American Campaign Medal Ribbon, American Defense Medal Ribbon, Army Good Conduct Medal Ribbon, Army Presidential Unit Citation (a.k.a. Distinguished Unit Citation), Bronze Star Medal Ribbon, Occupation of Germany Ribbon, Silver Star Medal Ribbon, and WWII Victory Medal Ribbon (a.k.a. Victory Ribbon).

Snow served his community as an active member of the Tonkawa VFW, a member of the Kay County, Oklahoma Draft Board during the first Viet Nam war, and Tonkawa School Board. He was inducted into the Oklahoma Military Hall of Fame on November 11, 2008. He passed away on November 4, 1973.

Honoring those who served:

Tony Pando

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Mike Schatz: Interview with Tony Pando

I enlisted in the Oklahoma Army National Guard after graduation from high school in 2004. It was three years after the World Trade Center bombing, and that just stuck with me. Several of my friends joined the local Ponca City National Guard unit, and I decided to join it as well. I did not want to go active, since I was married at the time and had a daughter. While I was in the guard, I was deployed twice, first with Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2008-2009, and then with Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan from 2011-2012. Each tour was nine months in country, with three months "train-up."

During Iraqi Freedom, we were stationed at an FOB (forward operating base) in Bagdad. We were teamed with Special Forces units. We did not run a lot of missions on our own, but

we transported a lot of high value detainees for Special Forces. We transferred them from prison to prison or camp to camp when necessary. Most of these missions were in Bagdad. We usually transferred in a four-vehicle convoy of heavily armored vehicles. Sometimes we would join a convoy if warranted. We also worked with route-clearance convoys. None of the detainees spoke English, so we really did not communicate with them. When we were at base, we communicated by e-mail or skyping. It was not like Vietnam or other conflicts where it took weeks to receive or mail letters home. We did not have phones in Iraq, but we had a couple in Afghanistan. Our vehicles were armored and had seen better days, but they were maintained well. Our area supported Special Forces and other units, so we had good quality food. Iraqi women cooked for us; breakfast, lunch, and dinner. We got food supplies about once a month, and they stayed in our camp area and cooked for us every day but Sunday. The army still had cooks then, but

because we worked with Special Forces, our system was different. We also had Iraqi soldiers on our base. They guarded the towers and other things and did the tower watch. None of them turned their weapons on us, like you heard about in the news, but we were careful around them. We kept our eyes open and were alert. The Commanding Officer of the Iraqi troops was a good guy; we got to know him fairly well. Many of them were working with us because it was safer, and they hoped to get Visas to come here if they did a good job.

During Enduring Freedom (Afghanistan) we were stationed at Camp Xiohag at first, then later at Bad-Pakh, which was in the middle of nowhere. I don't remember much about my first day in the country except that it was hot. When we were stationed at Xiohag, we ran a lot of patrols up and down Highway 7. It was pretty routine. We were about the 2nd group there, so we had good, almost new vehicles, and they were armored and well maintained. We were far enough back in the convoy that IEDs were not



TONY PANDO

a problem. The lead vehicles and mine sweepers were hit, though. Part of our mission was to clear routes along Highway 7. I don't remember some of it; I just put it out of my mind. There was not much to do during down time, so

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we worked out a lot. We had a small, make-shift tent for that. We bought a TV from the local Afghans, who had a little shop, and then bought a play station; some of us did that. Being isolated, there was not a lot to do. We were far enough out in both places that we never got to see any of the big entertainers.

We had local Afghan Militias that covered the watch positions surrounding our position. They were OK. They were pretty laid back. In Iraq, we only had four specialists and a staff NCO, so we did not deal with officers much. NCOs took care of everything. In Afghanistan, one officer in particular was awesome, and he was an NCO before he became an officer, so he really knew how to treat the troops. We dealt mostly with the enlisted Special Forces guys. There was not a great deal of pressure or stress in either place, but we always stayed prepared. Since I am Catholic, I always said a little prayer for everyone in the platoon's safety before we went on any missions or patrols.

I got out of the National Guard in 2012, and I received the Combat Infantry Badge and Army Commendation Medal. I use the VA for any medical issues and have access to a local doctor. I have the GI Bill and other benefits available to me. Being home has been great. My wife was pregnant while I was in Iraq, and the military and Red Cross made sure I had leave for the baby, who had a brief complication. I have more of a situational awareness since I have been home; I pay attention to my surroundings, but in a good way. I try not to think of the mess over there now.

Honoring those who served:

Jim Smithheisler

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Jim Smithheisler

CW4 USA (Ret.)

Thailand 1965

Vietnam 1971-1972

Although the 2015 articles feature Veterans of the Gulf Wars, veterans that were previously missed are invited to send letters regarding their service in a country with which the United States was engaged in conflict. Mike Schatz recently received an account of service in Viet Nam from Jim Smithheisler.

I graduated from Tonkawa High School in 1961. I started my military career with the US Army National Guard at Tonkawa in 1961 and transferred to the US Air Force in 1962. My first exposure to the Vietnam conflict came in the Air Force when I was temporarily reassigned from Kadena AFB, Okinawa, to the Korat Royal Thai Air Base in Thailand in late 1965. I was a fuel systems

specialist working on F-105 aircraft, which were flying combat missions over Vietnam.

One incident which remains forever fresh in my mind was the night my maintenance team was tasked with repairing the aft fuel pumps in an F-105 that was supposed to be on a turn-around mission. Somebody well above my pay grade made the decision to complete the repairs without defueling the aircraft. Because of the inherent danger involved with working inside a fuel tank that has not been properly purged of fuel and/or fumes, the aircraft was parked on the back side of the airfield well away from any other aircraft. The repair work took us about four hours to complete, working in the dark with only small flashlights for illumination and the distracting sound of automatic weapons engaging in a fire-fight a hundred yards from our location to keep us entertained. The good news, the aircraft made its scheduled mission take-off time. The bad news, the aircraft was shot down and destroyed within fifteen minutes after take-off.



JIM SMITHHEISLER

My second and last exposure to the Vietnam conflict came in the US Army when I was assigned as a fixed-wing pilot to the 74th Reconnaissance Airplane Company in Phu Loi, South Vietnam, flying the O-1 "Bird Dog." When I arrived in country in November, 1971 I was assigned as the maintenance officer for the 3rd platoon, which was based at the Cu Chi airfield. While most of my flying involved test and maintenance flights, I did spend some interesting hours flying combat support missions. Some typical missions were low-level reconnaissance flights where we flew low and

slow to entice the enemy to shoot at us so that we could spot their location; convoy cover flights, where we would keep ground convoy commanders advised as to terrain and other obstacles that might be potential threats to the convoy; courier flights, where we would deliver the mail to troop locations around South Vietnam; and morale flights, where we would deliver soft drinks, beer and comfort foods to soldiers without access to such goodies.

While most of my flights were "routine" and did not involve any direct contact with enemy forces,

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the time spent was never boring, especially since I was flying around in a small, unarmed airplane in a combat zone without a wingman to keep me company. My backseat, if present, was either a brand new in-country 2nd Lieutenant with no clue as to what he was doing or a Vietnamese soldier who could (or would) not speak English.

During the Vietnam conflict I was awarded three Air Medals: the National Defense Service Medal, the Vietnam Service Medal, and the Vietnam Campaign Medal. I retired from the Army National Guard as a Chief Warrant Officer (CW4) in 1990 after serving a total of 26 years in the military. During my military career, I flew numerous airplanes: T-41B, T42, O-1, U-8 D & G and U-21A, and helicopters; UH-1 D & H (Huey), OH-58, OH-6 and UH-60 (Blackhawk).