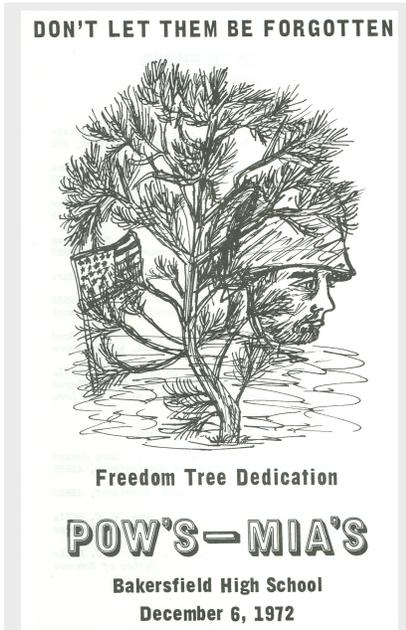


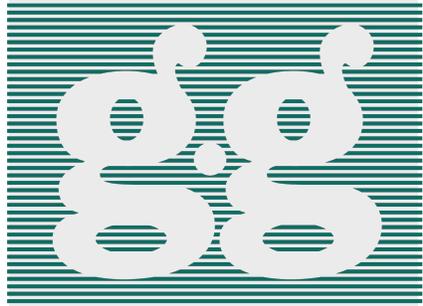
# Still Got the Blues

## Bakersfield High School Alumni Quarterly



Flyer for the Freedom tree Dedication.

**A Special Thank you to Our Partners at**



**GLINN & GIORDANO  
PHYSICAL THERAPY**



## Driller Corner...

*By: Milena Nord Class of 1993*

Driller James Burton Mills proudly attended Bakersfield High School from 1955 to 1958. He was an honor student, was part of the Inter-Racial Council, lettered in football, basketball, and track, and held multiple offices on the Student Council. During his time at BHS, James (Jimmy to those close to him) likely passed by the Student Activity Building and walked through Elm Grove thousands of times. As he did, his mind was likely fixed on Friday night's game, the test he had next period, or the girl he wanted to talk to. He probably laughed with his friends lightheartedly, having no idea that someday, he would give his life for his country - and that someday, there would be a plaque on this very campus bearing his name and a tree planted to honor his memory...a tree that would forever signify to future Drillers that a hero had once walked here.

Mills once speculated during his senior year at BHS that he "might like to fly around the world in a helicopter." After graduating from BHS in 1958, he attended and graduated from the University of California, Berkeley and entered the Newport, Rhode Island Naval Officers' School in 1963. In 1964, he entered Flight School at Pensacola, went on to become a Naval Radar Intercept Officer (RIO), and flew over 148 missions at Midway and 48 missions in Vietnam.



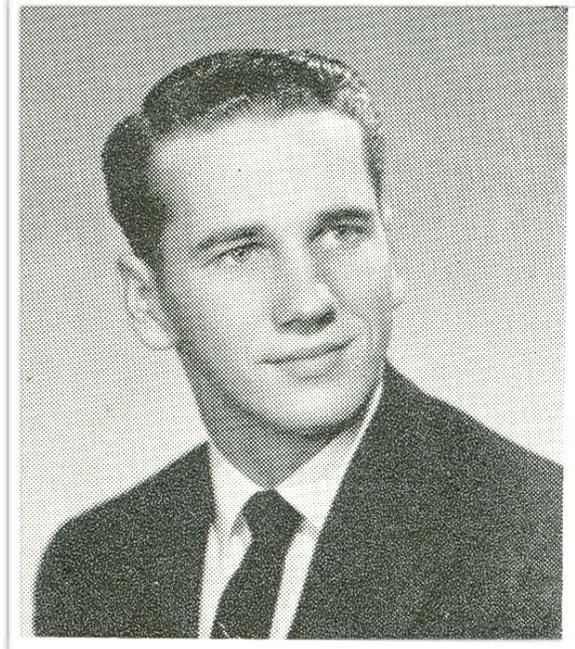
A lieutenant junior grade, Mills was not married and had no children, and, according to his sister, Ann Mills Griffiths, he volunteered for a second tour “so that other radar officers who had wives and kids wouldn’t have to go back.” On September 21, 1966, Mills was assigned to Fighter Squadron Twenty-One aboard the carrier USS Coral Sea. Mills’ F-4B Phantom was one of two aircraft engaged in a reconnaissance mission over what was then North Vietnam when his plane disappeared from radar, made no “Mayday” call, and failed to return to the ship. After numerous, extensive searches yielded nothing, Mills and pilot Captain James Bauder were declared missing in action.

On December 6, 1972, a ceremony was held in Harvey Auditorium to honor Mills for his service and sacrifice. A “Freedom Tree” was planted by the Student Activity Building, and its accompanying plaque was unveiled that morning by Mills’ parents, Mr. and Mrs. E.C. Mills. The plaque read:

THE FREEDOM TREE  
WITH THE VISION OF UNIVERSAL  
FREEDOM  
FOR ALL MANKIND  
THIS TREE IS DEDICATED TO  
LCDR JAMES MILLS  
AND ALL  
PRISONERS OF WAR  
AND  
MEN MISSING IN ACTION

For years afterward, as late as 2003, the crash continued to be investigated, but still, no answers were found. In 2006, a Vietnamese fisherman near Quynh Phuong snagged a piece of Mills’ cockpit canopy in his net. The area was further investigated and more pieces of the aircraft were found, and in 2011, investigators were able to verify that it was indeed the aircraft belonging to Bauder and Mills. In 2017, bone material was recovered that was eventually determined to belong to Captain Bauder. And the next year, a rib bone was found at the wreckage site that, through DNA analysis, confirmed that, after almost 52 years, James Mills’ remains had finally been found at the bottom of the South China Sea. As the news traveled back to Bakersfield, BHS students enthusiastically welcomed him home by gathering along California Avenue, holding flags and singing the national anthem, and showing pride and support for their fellow Driller.

Soon after that welcome home ceremony, the Freedom Tree originally planted in 1972 in



James Burton Mills’ Senior Picture

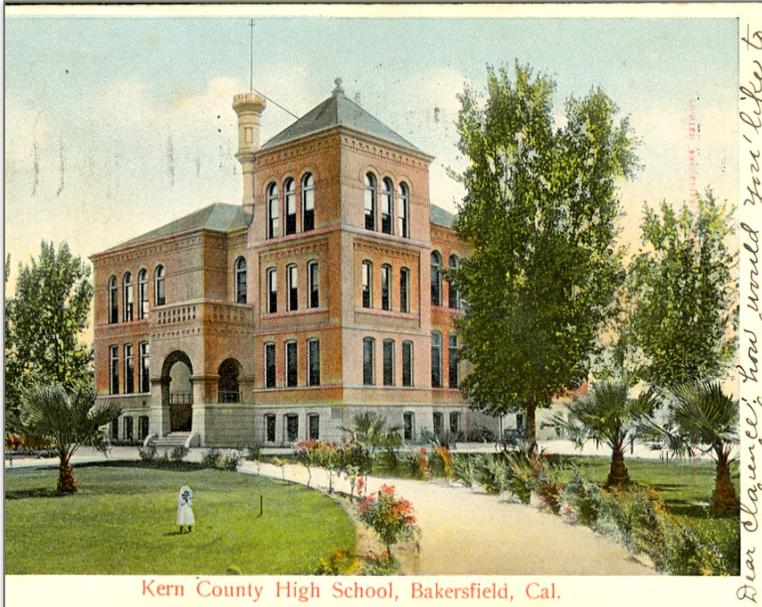
honor of Mills was uprooted during a storm. A new location in Elm Grove was decided upon, and a new Freedom Tree was dedicated on Friday, October 4, 2019.

There to witness this historic dedication were family members, veterans, students, parents, staff, and alumni. Mills’ sisters Judie Mills Taber and Ann Mills Griffiths were in attendance and shared with the crowd both their thankfulness that their brother’s remains had finally been found and their sincere appreciation for this memorial.

Today, as current Drillers walk through Elm Grove and enjoy the shade of this beautiful tree, they may be laughing and joking with friends. They may be thinking about Friday’s game, or tomorrow’s test, or the girl in their next class. They may not yet understand how fleeting and precious life is, but as they look at the Freedom Tree and read the plaque dedicated to James Burton Mills, a fellow Driller whose life was given in service for his country, maybe they will be reminded that THEIR lives matter, that THEY count...that they too might someday be remembered.

**Ideas for stories or things you want to see?**

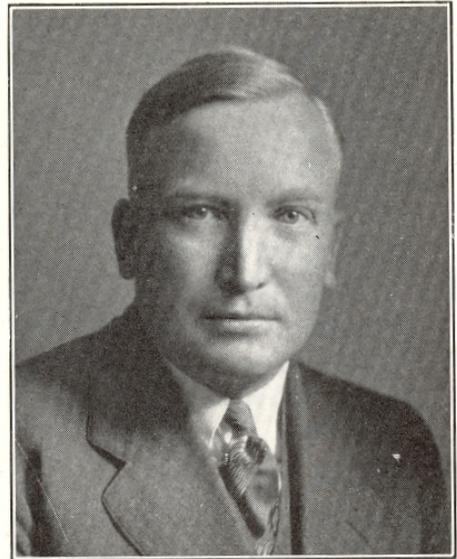
We want your feedback! If you have something you would like to share, please contact Mel Wilford at: [melmarie23@sbcglobal.net](mailto:melmarie23@sbcglobal.net)



Kern County High School, Bakersfield, Cal.

## Days Gone by...

A postcard from the Kern County Union High School's original Commercial building.



HERMAN A. SPINDT

MR. H. A. SPINDT, PRINCIPAL

*H.A. Spindt.*

## Ever Wonder How Some of Our Buildings Got Their Names?

*By: Melissa Wilford Class of 2002*

What we now call Spindt Hall was built in two parts both having been designed by preeminent regional architect Charles Biggar. Original construction began in 1924 and the second phase from 1937-38. Various remodels and updates have taken place since the 1952 earthquake.

Following his death in 1960, School Administrators named the building in honor Dr. Herman A. Spindt in 1962.

Herman A. Spindt began his legacy in KCUH in 1917 when he became the History and Political Science teacher. He went on to serve as principal and Kern County Union High Superintendent from 1922 through 1938. He was also extremely active in various educational organizations during his tenure in Kern County.

Dr. Spindt then moved on to become Director of Admissions and Relations at University of California Berkley.



Spindt Hall as it looked in 1963