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Sharing Military History

Cordell Hall volunteers
his time to keep battle
stories alive

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ON THE COVER



Cordell Hall, no stranger to war, serves up history at the U.S. Veterans Museum.

Photo by Vanessa Polozola.

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Sharing MILITARY HISTORY

— By Amber D. Browne

Military life has been a part of Cordell Hall's family for decades. He has dated his family tree back to the Revolutionary War, and that fact is part of what drives his interest in military memorabilia. Cordell collected enough military items over the years to fill a 30x40-foot, two-story space. He started his collections with a few World War II items from his father, Private First Class Jesse Hall, who served in the Fourth Infantry Division. Cordell, who served in the Air Force, began to buy flight wings at flea markets, and it went on from there. "It just kinda grew on me and got out of hand. That's what my wife says," he joked.

When he heard about the plan to open the U.S. Veterans Museum in Granbury five years ago, his wife, Linda, knew they had found the perfect place to house some of his collection.

When Cordell first saw the space on Thorpe Springs Road, he knew he had his work cut out for him. "It was dark, dingy and rough." So, Cordell decided to step in as a volunteer and clean up the old feed store. Carpenters built walls inside the metal building to make show rooms. The local Brookshire's grocery store donated some of its old ceiling tiles for use inside the museum. Cabinets, also donated, line the museum's walls filled with war keepsakes.

Many veterans have spent hours at the museum, helping to organize the hundreds of pieces of memorabilia that come in on a regular basis. "You get to know these people, and they're just like friends," Cordell said. Family members of veterans who have passed on drop off medals and uniforms to keep the memory of their loved ones alive. "They're ordinary people who have done extraordinary things. A lot of people say that, but it's true," Cordell said. Having heard his share of war stories over the years, he

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enjoys sharing them with people who visit. Cordell is always happy to give a tour to anyone who drops by.

Cordell's father-in-law, Staff Sergeant Eugene Richardson, fought at the Battle of the Bulge in 1945. "He came face-to-face to one German, who had him in



his crosshairs," he said, adding that his father-in-law froze. "He said, 'I can still see that German smiling at me, but he didn't pull the trigger. I got out of there as fast as I could.'"

Cordell is no stranger to war himself. He grew up in rural Kentucky and moved to Texas after graduating from high school. His cousin was in the Air Force and encouraged Cordell to join in 1966 before he got drafted. "When I went to enlist in the Air Force, I found out I had been drafted. I don't know how they did it, but I got released from the Army to the Air Force." Asked where he wanted to go, Cordell chose then-Carswell Air Force Base in Fort Worth and asked to be stationed in Europe. He didn't get his wish. He trained in North Dakota and was stationed in Guam, where he worked on B-52 and KC-135 jet engines. Cordell thought often about getting back home on U.S. soil. "It was a lot of hard work, but I had some fun and met some nice people over there."



He was released from service in December 1970 and entered the work force. The military crept back into his life in 1981, when he joined the 49th Armored Division. "I had a ball. It was

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hot, hard and tiring, but I met a lot of guys and a lot of friends." Cordell went on two weekend drills with the division each month until 1986.

Although educating others about veterans' personal war stories comes easily for Cordell, sometimes, it can be difficult to share his own experiences. He lost four lifelong friends in Vietnam. "I tell everybody, they're still young," he said. "There are a lot of other guys who did a lot more than I did." And, that's why Cordell spends so many hours volunteering at the museum. "It's a tribute to all the people who never came back. And the ones who came back, who still have a lot of problems. And the ones that don't," he explained. "It's just in me to help people, especially those who can't help themselves."

Cordell was diagnosed with Chronic Lymphocytic Leukemia three years ago. "I had a hard time with it for about a week," he confessed. He could have a bone marrow transplant, but there is no

known cure for the disease. "At least I know now when I'm going to go." His wife Linda has had a hard time dealing with the diagnosis, but Cordell tells her they have to live each day like it's the last.

And, Cordell spends his days doing what he enjoys. Each day he learns more about weapons from various wars and hears other's personal experiences.





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Cordell had the pleasure of getting to know World War II veteran and long-time museum supporter, Al Getchell. Al passed away recently, but Cordell remembers him fondly. "He kept us going all the time." Cordell's wife even called him sweetheart. Photos of Al can be seen in the museum with his uniforms and patches. His ashes were even placed into a torpedo and launched into the Pacific Ocean off of Hawaii. "So, he's back out there," Cordell said. "It's people like that – I've met so many people."

The museum has really come together and includes several rooms dedicated to all of the wars, with the exception of the Revolutionary War. Tom Green also volunteers at the museum and works each day to organize and display the military memorabilia. From machine guns and



a Civil War canon to uniforms and a C-119 aircraft outside, the U.S. Veterans Museum has plenty of history to offer. "It just goes on and on and on!" Cordell exclaimed. One of his favorite pieces is a metal helmet from World War II. One side has a small bullet hole, and the other side has about a two-inch wide hole where the bullet escaped. "It's what it stands for. That guy was killed at the Battle of the Bulge," Cordell explained. "He never knew another step."

The museum sponsors events throughout the year, including Memorial Day. Volunteers displayed 1,000 flags in a field in Granbury last Memorial Day. Although maintaining volunteer help and funding can be challenging, Cordell plans to do what he can to help keep the museum up and running. "It's just something you've got to do," he said. "There's something that just won't let me leave." **NOW**

Editor's Note: For more information, visit www.usveteransmuseum.com.



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