

Veterans Day

November 11, 2020

HONORING ALL WHO SERVED





Saratoga Sun's 2020 Veterans Day Section HONORING ALL WHO SERVED



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Photo by Mike Armstrong



Penny DeWitt Seager was instrumental in keeping this howitzer in Hanna.

Hanna supporter of veterans to be honored in park she preserved

by Mike Armstrong
"I didn't know she wasn't in the military," Hanna resident Rose Vaughn said. "She did so much for the VFW and anything associated with the military, I just assume she was. I really was shocked when her son told me Penny never belonged in any military service."

Vaughn was talking about Penny DeWitt Seager who passed away in September.

"It was right after the fire that almost got Hanna," Larry DeWitt, her son, said. "She had been out one evening and when she got out of the car to go to the house, they think she had a heart attack."

Citizens of Hanna know of Seager's love for Veteran's Park next to the Hanna Recreation Center and her efforts to keep it intact. She is credited for keeping the howitzer in Hanna that make its home in the park.

The Army was going to move the howitzer to another location and Sager contacted politicians and military personnel and convinced all, it should stay where it was.

She was successful. The big gun stands watch over the stone monuments honoring those that fell in past wars from

the surrounding area.

When the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) branch in Medicine Bow closed two years back, there were no members left to do the Avenue of Flags that are put out on certain holidays. Seager stepped in to do the job.

To honor her memory, an account set up by friends of Seager, at RNB State Bank Hanna Branch. The account, is for funds contributed to buy a memorial bench in her name and put it in Veterans' Park.

DeWitt doesn't know exactly how his mother became so passionate about supporting the armed forces. Her grandfather, brother and son all served, and DeWitt thinks maybe she was honoring their service.

"She always wanted to help others," DeWitt said. "She made care packages for boys overseas all the time. There was no denying, my mother was very patriotic."

Seager joined the Women's Auxiliary and was involved in social events that supported the military service personnel.

DeWitt said his mother came to Hanna from Lander to work for Arch Coal in 1976. He said she started driving haul trucks and after time was operating all heavy equipment.

"My mother twice retired from Arch," DeWitt said. "There was a downturn in the mines so my mother took her retirement. Then, about five years later, the mines got busy again and they asked her to come back. So she ended up retiring twice from the same job."

DeWitt said as long as he can remember, his mother

supported service men and women in any way she could.

Seager went to Hanna Town Councils over the years to promote any events the military services might have in Carbon County. Most of the time, Seager wore her hair up but the occasions she let it down her hair fell to her calves.

"To say the least, her long hair made her memorable," DeWitt said. "She loved her dogs, her artifacts and objects from Native American culture and all things to do with Elvis Presley. Oh yeah, and tigers"

DeWitt said his mother bought a 1978 Ford Truck that had a cab with a camper like shell around it.

"It was almost like a van when you went inside, and if I am right, I believe there were not many of these made, something like 500, but I don't know for sure," DeWitt said. "What was exceptional is she had a mural of tigers painted on it. I think it was the biggest mural WyoTech did, at least at that time. It grabbed your attention."

Seager will be missed for her many character traits by residents in northern Carbon County, but she will be hard to replace when it comes to honoring the armed forces. It is fitting during this first Veterans Day without her; Hanna folk are looking to honor her for her patriotic services, even though she never joined the military. They are doing so by putting a memorial bench for this civilian in a Veterans' Park, dedicated to those who have served our country in the armed forces.

DeWitt said his mother would love it.



THANK YOU VETERANS!

Saratoga Sun's 2020 Veterans Day Section HONORING ALL WHO SERVED

A regular guy that did crazy stuff

After training to be a pararescuer, 'no' was not in Adrian Durham's vocabulary

by Joshua Wood

When one first meets Dr. Adrian Durham, the recently hired doctor for the Platte Valley Clinic, it's not difficult for one to find themselves at ease. What's more, Durham doesn't seem out of place in the environment of a rural clinic despite his vast life experience.

For many, Durham would appear to be the idea of the American Dream. The son of immigrants who grew up to serve his country both in the Armed Forces and as a doctor.

Durham was born in Hartford, Connecticut a first-generation American. His parents, immigrants from Guyana, would eventually move Durham and his siblings to their home country when he was six years old. The future doctor, his sister and his brother returned to the United States when he was 11 years old.

In 1999, Durham enlisted in the United States Air Force.

"I grew up a poor kid (and) was trying to be a pilot. Originally I was going to try and go to (the) Air Force Academy, be a fighter pilot, fly fast, do fast things and then my eyes went bad," said Durham.

At the time, the Air Force Academy wouldn't let anyone be a fighter pilot if they didn't have uncorrected 20/20 vision. With an astigmatism and 24/27 vision, Durham found his dreams of being a fighter pilot grounded. While he attempted to achieve the dream of being a pilot as a private citizen, the cost of flight school was too much. So, Durham enlisted in the Air Force and found himself in pararescue, also known as PJs.

"Pararescue is the special operations part of the Air Force. Every branch has their special operations part. (The) Air Force has pararescue and combat control, Army has Green Berets and the Rangers, Navy has SEALs and Marines have Force Recon. So, basically a bunch of crazy guys that all have different kinds of mission sets that allow us to do certain missions," Durham said. "Our mission set allows us to adapt to any of the other teams. Sometimes we're embedded with teams, sometimes we're doing our own rescue and recovery. Primarily, our forte was designed around recovering pilots from behind enemy lines before the enemy could get to them. We had to parachute out around the area, hit the ground, track them down, find them, stabilize them, take them home."

According to Durham, pararescue was trained to handle any terrain. For the PJs, no mountain was to high and no valley was to low.

"I remember playing with G.I. Joe as a kid, then I became one overnight," said Durham. Well, not overnight. We have the longest training regiment in two and a half years before we actually start becoming qualified to be on the team."

When Durham first entered pararescue, he went through 10 weeks of INDOC, or indoctrination. At the end of those 10 weeks

was 'hell week'. Durham started with 96 other potential PJs. By the time it was over, only 13 graduated.

"After the first 10 weeks, I found out this was exactly where I was supposed to be. The way I looked at it, I had nine personal fitness instructors to get me in shape," Durham said.

Most private citizens would probably think twice before engaging with any program put on by these fitness

instructors as Durham and the other potential PJs were required to run everywhere while carrying objects ranging from light poles to sections of railroad track. On top of that, they would have to do push-ups or pull-ups before entering a building or leaving a building.

"There was always something to get in and out," said Durham.

And if you messed up? Well, you'd get "smoked" which meant some form of physical activity until your muscles failed. A PJ could expect to do up to 5,000 push-ups a week.

"Everything's usually until muscle failure," Durham said.

PJs also go through a weekly physical exam in which the mileage you're expected to run increases, but you can never go below running a mile in seven minutes.

"You've got a four mile run, 28 minutes or better, and then you have calisthenics, pushups, pullups, situps, dips, flutter kicks and chin ups," said Durham. "They increase every week. Then you go to a pool and you do a fin swim and you're doing anywhere from 2,000 to 3,000 meters all the way up to a 4,000 meter fin swim in an hour and 20 minutes. So you've got a minute lap to do that. So, that's Monday."

The next day would see PJs doing water confidence evaluations, which test how long pararescuers can stay underwater while performing tasks. These would vary from tying knots to doffing and donning equipment, all while holding their breath.

"The object is not to breathe. The object is never to think that you deserve to breathe and you just hold your breath until the job's done," Durham said. "Anytime you come up, no matter how long you've been down there, anytime you got to come to surface it's got to be controlled decent."

According to Durham, by the time someone has finished the two and half year training to be a PJ, the word 'no' cannot be found in their vocabulary.

"I kind of stumbled into it and if I had to do it all over again, I'd still do it. It was like the best time of my life. They, basically, remake you.

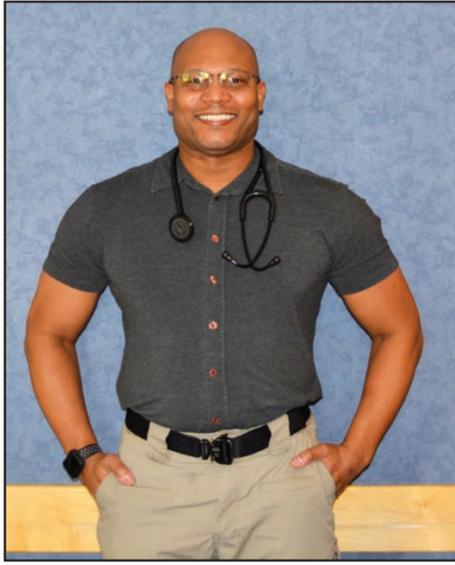
After that, there's nothing hard. Any PJ out there can stop what he's doing one day and be like 'I'm going to be a doctor' and go be a doctor," said Durham. "Too many times, people put too many barriers up asking 'what if'. After becoming a PJ, it took the 'what if' out of it. There's only so much what if-ing you can do. You can 'what if' until the sun goes down and never get anything done. I used to be a horrible procrastinator."

While Durham may be living in Saratoga and seeing patients, he hasn't left the Air Force life just yet. Though he is not active duty, he is still in the Air Force Reserves and, instead of being a PJ, he is working to be a flight surgeon in Aerospace Medicine.

"In (the) Air Force, you can't be a physician and a pararescue at the same time. It's one or the other. So, for me, I feel the best thing I can do for one of our teams when I get back to them is as a physician and taking care of them," Durham said. "After 11 deployments into a lot of places, (I want to) take care of my boys who have kind of hung in there and they need me to hang around a little bit longer."

Of those 11 deployments, seven were in Iraq and four were in Afghanistan. According to Durham, while they are similar arenas there is a difference in elevation. "Kandahar is around 2,000 feet which is kind of like a hill in comparison to where we are now and then Iraq is pretty much around sea level," said Durham. "Each terrain poses different difficulties and then whatever the enemy has access to also poses different difficulties."

For anyone curious about wanting to become a PJ, Durham says there is plenty online for people to get an idea of what would be involved. As for those locally who may be curious about the process, the new doctor is more than willing to offer advice. Despite his unique life experiences, Durham said that he isn't that much different from anyone else. Said Durham, "At the end of the day, I'm just a regular guy that just did some crazy stuff and I'm here to help people."



Dr. Adrian Durham is putting his skills to use at Platte Valley Clinic.

Photo by Amanda Shepherd



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Be true to people

In the Marines, Benjamin Spaulding found the building blocks to continue to improve himself

by Joshua Wood

“Basically, you’re the lowest of the low and they build you back into what they define as a Marine. Every Marine—whatever position you’re in, whatever job you have—they want to build that mentality up that you are a leader.”

Benjamin Spaulding has lived in Saratoga for five years and, just recently, was elected to the Saratoga Town Council. In his time in the Valley, Spaulding has shown the leadership aspect instilled into him by the United States Marine Corps (Marines) as he led the formation of Platte Valley Little League and has served as the chairman of the Saratoga Recreation Commission.

Growing up, Spaulding had often thought about joining the Marines but was on the fence about it in his high school years. If he would join, he knew what his Military Occupation Specialty (MOS) code would be.

“I went in as an 0311, which is infantry. Primarily I was an infantry guy. I opted to go to the scout sniper platoon and went through that whole process and then operated as a sniper and then as an observer for the scout sniper platoon,” said Spaulding. “When I went into the Marine Corps, that’s what I wanted to do. I was a big fan of Tom Berenger’s ‘Sniper’ back in the day. Watching him with a gilly suit crawl across the ground and people run past him and couldn’t see him.”

Like many people around Spaulding’s age, what solidified his decision to join the Marines were the events of September 11, 2001. Spaulding had just graduated high school in Colorado and was working construction.

“I always had an interest in it ever since I was little but I was on the fence about it,” Spaulding said. “After 9/11 happened, I just wanted to do something to serve my country and it gave me a position to take that first step and enlist.”

Obviously, Spaulding couldn’t just walk into the

Marines and ask to be a sniper. Like everybody else, he had to go through boot camp.

“What people don’t understand about boot camp is, yes it’s hard but, they strip any kind of identity from you. That’s why, when you go into boot camp, it’s the shaving of the head,” Spaulding said. “You’re learning how to re-educate yourself in physical fitness and they push the limits on you which is really to gut check you on where you’re at in your life. You have to go in there and you’re learning basically how to do everything again. You’re learning how to brush your teeth, you’re learning how to clean yourself, you’re learning how to iron, sew. It’s taking everything that you have and basically saying ‘You’re not who you are. You’re not Ben Spaulding anymore. You’re a Marine.’”

While in boot camp, potential Marines learn the history of the U.S. Marine Corps, how to address senior ranking members both in the Marines and in other branches of the Armed Forces and the ranks and structure of the Marine Corps.

“It’s just basically going to school with a little bit more physical (education). If you do something wrong, you’re going to be doing pushups or you’re going to be getting trashed for about two hours from 7 o’clock at night to about 9 o’clock at night,” said Spaulding. “If you do something wrong, they don’t just punish you. They punish everybody. When you go to war, decisions that you make are going to cost people’s lives. That’s what they imprint on to you.”

Following boot camp and graduation, when Spaulding could officially call himself a Marine, he made his first attempt at becoming a sniper. Boot camp may have been tough, but it didn’t hold a candle to sniper school. When it came to INDOC (indoctrination), the process lasted two to three days and quickly narrowed down the pool of potential snipers.

“I went through two INDOCs. The first INDOC I did was right when I joined, got out into the Marine Corps fleet which is where your unit is. I went through that process and I quit about three-quarters of the way through,” Spaulding said. “What they’re looking for is they want to see guys that don’t quit. Went overseas, came back and then went through the process again and made it through the process.”

While the physical aspects of snipers school were certainly demanding—Spaulding recalled running six miles upon first waking followed by push-ups and pull-ups—so too were the mental aspects.

“When we went through, we had to go up on a hill at night and had to stay awake. They were trying to sneak up on us and we couldn’t let them into

our position,” said Spaulding. “I think we started with 20 guys and by the time we finished the INDOC there were only four of us left.”

The whole purpose of sniper school was to create as many HOGs for the Marine Corps, HOGs being Hunter of Gunmen.

“School trained snipers are considered a HOG and then an unschool trained sniper is a PIG,” Spaulding said. “There’s times they push you through school to get as many HOGs as they can. It just kind of helps strengthen your platoon, shooters, observers and stuff like that.”

While in INDOC, Spaulding had his chance to be like Berenger in the movie “Sniper” as he crawled on the ground in a gilly suit. In one challenge, snipers had to do a stalk in their gilly suit with their drag bag—which held their sniper rifle—attached with the goal of going from 1,000 yards down to 200 yards before taking a shot. The penalty for getting caught while stalking, whether you were at 999 yards or 300 yards, was to bear crawl gilly suit and all back to the truck.

“It challenges you every step of the way but that’s the thing about snipers is you’re operating in a two man team and there’s going to be some situations that you have to be extremely patient on and you have to be willing to physically and mentally take the challenges that are thrown at your direction,” said Spaulding.

Spaulding doesn’t deny that the Marines helped define who he is today nor that it helped him build character. He said that while he sees some people still hold onto that identity of who they were as a Marine, he prefers to think of it in a different way in that it gave him the building blocks to continue to improve upon himself.

“Whatever I do, somebody is always looking and I need to have the mentality of holding myself to a higher standard,” Spaulding said. “Whether it be through the Marine Corps or being a firefighter or a refinery operator or a public official. Be true to people.”

Spaulding encouraged anyone either currently in high school or recently graduated to serve their country. Along with the building blocks he was provided by the Marine Corps, it also helped him make lifelong bonds.

“I think one of the biggest things I would give to any high schooler, or even out of high school, is you’ll never experience the experiences you will have just being a civilian. You make friends you’ll have for life,” said Spaulding. “I just went and saw a buddy of mine up in Idaho, my sniper partner. Hadn’t seen him in 15 years and it was like we didn’t miss a beat.”




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Love boat, Navy style

Hanna residents Traci and Joe Fowler met and fell in love while in the United States Navy

Photo by Mike Armstrong



Joe and Traci Fowler remember back to their days in the Navy together.

by Mike Armstrong

Traci and Joe Fowler, who live in Hanna and have two children, met in the Navy.

"We were on the same ship for a year and we never knew each other," Joe said. "We talked to each other because she was in communications and I was driving the ship."

Traci was an operations specialist, which she says meant that she sat in a room with 11 other people with computers all around, watching maps.

"We did a lot of air intercepts, watching other planes so that they wouldn't run into each other," Traci said. "We looked for smugglers and made sure boats were safe."

They were based in Virginia Beach, Virginia and on the same ship, the USS Yellowstone.

"It was a destroyer tender," Traci said. "It was the ship that did maintenance on destroyers out at sea. It was actually just a huge machine ship. There are hardly any of them left."

The Fowlers said the ship had over 2,000 personnel and, given where they were stationed on the ship, it is not surprising how they never saw each other.

"I was driving the boat and Traci would tell me what she saw on radar and she was my eyes," Joe said. "We probably talked 1,000 times, but never knew anything about each other. We were just doing our jobs."

Joe not only was driver of the ship, he worked on the cranes also. He remembers being hundreds of feet in the air working. He said the job cures fear of heights.

Both remember the surf and turf that would be served on your birthday.

"It was pretty sweet," Traci said. "Definitely a nice perk."

After serving on the same boat for a year, the two finally encountered each other.

"I won't ever forget the night we met," Traci laughed. "I had called my boyfriend at that time to ask what he wanted to do that night. He said he was sick, and was staying in. So I decided to go to the sports bar that was on the base in Norfolk and when I walk in, there he is with two other girls."

Traci went up to her boyfriend and asked how he was doing. She said he looked surprised and then she punched him in the face.

"Pow, I broke his nose and laid him out," Traci said. "I went over to

the other side of the bar, bought a pitcher of beer and watched the game. Joe walks up seeing me crying over my beer and asks if I am okay. He sat down and we started talking."

After they finished the beer, Joe asked if she needed a ride to her ship.

"He asked me what ship I was stationed on and I said Yellowstone and then he said that was his ship," Traci recounted. "We asked each other where we were stationed and realized we had been talking to each other over the year."

Traci said they started dating, got married and have been together 25 years.

The Fowlers agreed they had the best honeymoon as their ship went to many port-of-calls in the Mediterranean.

"We turned a six month cruise into our honeymoon," Traci said. "We got married and a day later we were shipped out. At first we kept it quiet, but after a while everyone knew. They didn't say anything to us until we came back, and then said married couples can't serve on the same ship."

Joe served on the Iowa during Desert Storm. He had a good friend die when the turret exploded on the ship. The friend had gone a week ahead of Joe. The George Washington aircraft carrier was the last ship Joe served on before he decided it was time to do something different.

Joe left the Navy in 1996 after serving 10 years and took care of their son Josh while Traci was at sea. She was gone almost a year on a boat that tracked drug smugglers off the coast of Columbia and Nicaragua.

"I saw some crazy stuff. Millions of dollars floating in cases along with bales of cocaine," Traci said. "I think one time we took in almost \$30 million in street value cocaine."

She said sometimes it was a little scary, especially when smugglers would pull out guns and start shooting but, overall, Traci said it was enjoyable to be out on the Caribbean Sea. In her off duty she got to do a lot of fishing.

"We ate fresh fish every day. One time I caught a 180 pound black-tipped shark," Traci said. "On the job side, I listened to different codes on the radio and we would break them and then get their contraband."

Traci enjoyed her last tour on

the USS Ennis Stalwart stopping drugs from coming into the country, but eventually she wanted to leave the Navy and start to help raise their son.

Traci left the Navy in 1997 and Joe joined the Army National Guard just as Traci came out.

For almost 11 years, Joe served and then was called to duty for a tour in Iraq. The Fowler family had grown to four with the addition of their daughter Jesse.

"Josh was a Navy baby," Joe said. "And Jesse was an army baby."

Joe went to camp and, while there, he was injured.

"I was watching a game of pick-up football as just a bystander when this guy going for the ball bowls me over," Joe said. "My knee was hurt. Then next day it was swollen badly, but my CO didn't think it was that bad, so I walked around on it. I didn't have any choice. They had me jumping out of my bunk that was the third one up."

When Joe told Traci what happened and how his leg was getting worse, she took action.

"I found out about it and started making phone calls on why my husband was still walking around on a bad leg," Traci said. "The injury happened on May 4, and they didn't get him home to a hospital until November."

The knee injury caused the Army to discharge Joe.

Both acknowledged there has been some hardship due to the injury, but there has not been much they could do but accept the situation.

Although Joe served 21 years, he gets no retirement from the armed forces, although he does get disability.

"It is just the way it is," Traci said. "Still, even going through all that, I have to say my years with the Navy were excellent and wouldn't trade them for the world."

"With the exception of my knee and discharge, I can't argue that my time in the military was great," Joe said. "I met my best friend and got to marry her."

"We had a great time and got to see the world," Traci said.

"Her job was top secret, and my job was always go-go-go," Joe said. "But when I got time to put my feet up, I got to do it with my wife. We got to cruise the world together. Not all guys can say that."

Happy Veterans Day to all our service members past and present!

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Our debt to the heroic men and women of our country can never be repaid, they have earned our undying gratitude. America will never forget their sacrifices.
- President Harry S. Truman

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Saratoga Sun's 2020 Veterans Day Section HONORING ALL WHO SERVED

The Navy's Jack-of-all-trades



Photo courtesy Bill Jones



Photo by Mike Armstrong

Five Star Admiral Chester Nimitz gives books to a Navy library that Bill Jones, right, was working at.

Bill Jones sits at his store in Elk Mountain as he talks about his times in the Navy.

Bill Jones spends time in Navy doing a bit of everything

by Mike Armstrong

Bill Jones, the proprietor for Bow River Crossing, grew up in Elk Mountain and has many fond memories of the time he served in the Navy.

Jones started his time in 1963 and left in 1967.

"I was a Beachmaster Unit (BMU), one of which is based at the Naval Amphibious Base Coronado which is at Coronado in California," Jones said. "I was a land sailor."

The sister BMU Two is based outside Norfolk, Virginia.

"We set up communications on the beach and then we worked bringing the troops and equipment, from the ships," Jones said. "The job is one of those not a lot of attention is given to, I don't think."

Jones traveled the Pacific as his job required. He was based in Chu-lai, Vietnam in 1966. He said Chu-lai was off the Bay of Tonkin. Besides Vietnam, Jones went up and down the Japanese coast. Okinawa, Taiwan, Philippines and South Korea were other places he did his task.

The job is important when it comes to an operation next to the sea. A BMU deploys and supports combat units in amphibious operations around the world. The BMU controls landing craft and amphibious vehicles on the beach from surf line to high water mark. They coordinate the beach entry of equipment, troops and supplies.

At the BMU radio shack, where Jones spent a lot of his time while in Vietnam, the unit monitored wind and surf conditions. The BMU provides limited assistance in local security and beach defense.

It does have its dangers. Jones said a few months after

he left, some BMU personnel were killed by mortar fire not far from where he had been stationed.

Jones has enjoyable stories about his time in the Navy. He retains pictures of a USO show that featured Bob Hope, Carol Baker, Anita Bryant, Joey Heatherton and other celebrities popular in the 1960s.

When asked about what time sticks out, he said meeting the last five star admiral and officer in the USA, Admiral Chester Nimitz.

Nimitz was born on February 24, 1885 and passed away February 20, 1966. Jones met the admiral just a few years before his death. The admiral was donating books to the library at the base on Goats Island where Jones was based.

Jones said he worked at the library about three months while he waited for orders. Nimitz talked about the books as he gave them to librarians. Jones remembers John Paul Jones being discussed.

"We helped him move the books and then we pushed up a frame case and put some of the books in," Jones said. "It was pretty neat, I was working with the last five star ever. I will always remember it."

Jones is justified in his awe of Nimitz. He met a legendary figure in our nation's military history.

Nimitz was a fleet admiral of the United States Navy. He played a major role in the naval history of World War II as Commander in Chief, U.S. Pacific Fleet and Commander in Chief, Pacific Ocean Areas, commanding Allied air, land and sea forces during World War II.

Nimitz was the leading Navy authority on submarines and oversaw the conversion

of these ships to propulsion from gasoline to diesel, then to build the world's first nuclear-powered submarine, the USS Nautilus.

Beginning in 1917, Nimitz was the Navy's leading developer of replenishment procedures which, during the Pacific war, would allow the U.S. fleet to operate away from ports for long periods of time. Nimitz served as Chief of Naval Operations from 1945 until 1947.

He was the United States' last surviving officer who served in the rank of fleet admiral. The USS Nimitz supercarrier, the lead ship of her class, is named for him. As Jones said, he was the last five star officer in all the armed forces.

Another world figure Jones met was Chiang Kai-shek.

"We were sitting on the beach in Taiwan," Jones said. "We were eating our K-rations and Chiang Kai-shek came down and joined us."

The beaches in Taiwan are strongly fortified against Chinese invasion, so it is not unusual for strong military presence to be by the sea.

Chiang was a Chinese Nationalist politician, revolutionary and military leader who served as the leader of the Republic of China between 1928 and 1975, first in mainland China until 1949 and then in Taiwan until his death. Chang was a strong ally of the United States during World War II and for years the U.S. recognized Chiang as the leader of China.

That changed in the 1970's but, when Jones met him, Chiang was still considered the leader of all China. Chiang always vowed he would sometime return to the mainland. He is buried in Taiwan.

While at the bases in the U.S. he said he was a jack-of-all-trades with his duties.

"I was a mailman, paymaster, in charge of health records, a court recorder and a driver," Jones said. "I took the CO (Commanding Officer) all over."

When he was working operations in Vietnam, he had very different jobs. He has pictures of him being near his radio hut and he also has pictures of him working on a DUKW353 (Duck).

"We had Ducks and they would bring in equipment and marines," Jones said. "Chu-lai was a busy place. I don't even know if it exists any more, but Ducks were important to our operation."

The first Ducks were introduced in 1943. It is an unusual vehicle. The controls are high forward and has a central tire inflation system, which allowed the driver to adjust tire pressure from his seat. As Jones said, Ducks were used to transport troops and equipment from ships that were moored off the nearby coast.

For navigation in water, the Duck was designed with a 31 foot steel hull that surrounds the truck frame assembly. The driving power was switched from the wheels to a rear mounted propeller with the flip of a lever. The rudder and front wheels were steered by the same mechanism. Ducks could go up to 50 miles per hour on land. These vehicle had to be kept in good working order at all times.

Jones said there was a time he got in a little trouble. He was going up the stairs in a bar in Japan. When he got to the landing, a marine from a nearby table came over and cold-cocked him. He tumbled down the stairs. Being the Navy (and probably some

Wyoming) guy he was, Jones ran back upstairs and threw his attacker down the stairs. Another Marine jumped in and was thrown down the stairs. By this time the shore patrol came and the Marine in charge let the Marines continue and told Jones to leave.

"Well, I guess you have to stick up for them," Jones replied.

The Marine in charge of the shore patrol, didn't like those words and took him in. Jones was scheduled to the Philippines the next morning. His commanding officer told him to leave with him, so Jones left Japan without facing the charges.

Later when he was on a ship, he was told to come before the captain and face the charges. The officer who had told Jones to depart with him, went to captain and told of Jones' commendations and his superior record. The captain basically told Jones to watch himself when on shore leave and it never went on his record.

Actually, he didn't really get in any trouble during his service.

Jones has two albums of pictures of his time in the service. A picture of Nimitz and Jones is dominant on one page of the album with his pictures of California.

"I really had a good time in the navy and even though it has been 55 years, some of my memories are strong," Jones said. "Like meeting this guy."

Jones pointed to the picture of himself and Nimitz in the library putting away books. Across the page of Nimitz was Jones working on a Duck.

It is true, Jones was a jack-of-all-trades during his time, serving in the Navy.

THANK YOU VETERANS!



Saratoga Sun's 2020 Veterans Day Section HONORING ALL WHO SERVED

Marine sees action in Southeast Asia

Remembering the late Steve Wilcoxson by remembering his service

**Editor's Note* This interview with the late Steve Wilcoxson ran on November 10, 2010 in the Saratoga Sun. With the passing of Wilcoxson earlier this year, the Sun wished to re-run this interview in his memory.*

By Liz Wood

For Steve Wilcoxson, joining the Marines during the Vietnam Conflict in 1968, was a rite of passage for young men in his hometown.

Wilcoxson had tried to join before he turned 18 years old, but his parents wouldn't sign the release.

When he turned 18 on July 4, 1968, he joined and went active duty Aug. 28.

Wilcoxson signed up for three years, but was medevaced nearly halfway through his second tour in Vietnam with an eye infection.

Wilcoxson enlisted from Sacramento, Calif., where he was in the first platoon and where the troops went through basic and Infantry Training Regiment (ITR) Advanced Infantry Training together. A concept that lasted until 1990 in the Marines, said Wilcoxson.

As an infantryman, Wilcoxson served with a line company in Vietnam – Kilo Company, 3rd Battalion, 7th Marines.

"It wasn't a lot of fun, things over there," said Wilcoxson in a recent interview.

His company was involved in Operation Que Son Valley, which was located south of Da Nang.

His company took 26 Viet Cong base camps and an underground hospital in the fall of 1969 and, as a unit, they received the meritorious award.

The underground hospital was one of the largest underground hospitals, which included a complete surgical unit and had three operating beds.

The base camps ranged in size from small platoons up to company size.

Wilcoxson's unit was also involved in the Operation Oklahoma Hills, which lasted six to eight weeks. This operation was in a mountainous area, said Wilcoxson, and there were a lot of enemy placements. Wilcoxson said that it was there that they had to "start cleaning everything out," while engaging in combat.

Wilcoxson did not go into detail about the combat in Vietnam, but said their unit lost nine men out of their original platoon.

Even though Wilcoxson did see combat in Vietnam, he said there were fun times, too.

He recalled a time when his

commanding officer (CO) was getting ready to rotate back to the states, and, when they passed the CO's office, they saw he had two cases of lobster.

Wilcoxson said the unit had been living on C Rations for weeks and the lobster was just too much to resist. They took both cases – one they had to share with the head of the mess hall to keep him quiet.

"There was a shake down," said Wilcoxson, "the CO was not happy."

Wilcoxson said that when he was on R&R (Rest & Recreation) in Hawaii, he flew back to the United States; something he wasn't supposed to do. Once there he extended his stay for 26 days and when he returned to Hawaii, the First Sergeant wanted Wilcoxson to pay for his trip back to Vietnam. Wilcoxson said he knew enough that if he didn't sign the paperwork, they couldn't take the cost of the plane fare out of his pay.

Prior to joining the Marines, Wilcoxson said he really didn't follow the rules. "The Marines helped organize my life," Wilcoxson said.

Wilcoxson said he and his friend, Steve Kuster, Sr., enjoyed racing cars. "My dad would say I was a hellraiser," Wilcoxson said.

One night four to five policemen tried to catch him and Kuster, but Wilcoxson managed to elude them. Unfortunately, Kuster did not, and shortly afterward Wilcoxson went into the Marines.

The Vietnam Conflict took its biggest toll on Wilcoxson after he returned home. Wilcoxson had gone to Citrus Heights to visit one of his buddies, Bobby Majors. On the way to Majors' grave he had to walk one block and on every one of the graves were birth years ranging from 1948 to 1950. He realized all the graves were men who had died in Vietnam.

It was then he began to research the Vietnam Conflict and why the United States became involved.

"I studied the Pentagon Papers as they came out," Wilcoxson said. He studied Ho Chi Min and Vietnam history.

"I think our involvement shouldn't have happened," said Wilcoxson. He admits he tends to be critical of the United States involvement in the conflict.

"Since we have invaded Afghanistan, I have called once or twice a week with my objections," Wilcoxson added.

Wilcoxson said being in a unit he saw what was taking place around him (in Vietnam), but he didn't get the whole



Steve waits for a "taxi" on a chopper pad in the Que Son Valley.

picture until he saw all those graves. He was overwhelmed.

"I am not a pacifist, but I am not sure there good decisions made," Wilcoxson said.

Wilcoxson added he is not paranoid, but he believes part of his job, as a veteran, is not to let it (Vietnam) happen again.

Wilcoxson added that when the people want the (U.S.) military there, it works better. "We're not fighting two battles." He used Yugoslavia and Sarajevo as an example; the people wanted us there, said Wilcoxson.

"We have to be more responsible," said Wilcoxson, with regard to the losses on both sides during Vietnam. "War is the most destructive force on the face of this planet."

"You hear stories about people who served in Vietnam, but I served with excellent people," Wilcoxson said.

After Wilcoxson was medevaced with an eye disease, he returned to the United States. He lost eyesight in his left eye, and it was untreatable in Vietnam.

Wilcoxson said when his mom and fiancé saw him, they didn't recognize him. He weighed 116 pounds and had an 18-inch waist.

Wilcoxson said he did not realize how his parents were affected by him serving in Vietnam until he returned home, but

said that his mom had a sense of humor when she got word through the local news that he was in a bar fight while in Okinawa. Wilcoxson said he and his friends were just wanting to have fun. Prostitutes kept making advances and they kept turning them down and soon a fight started. His mom wrote him a letter and said, "glad you're having fun."

After Wilcoxson's eye infection was cleared up, he wanted to return to Vietnam, but he didn't have enough time left to serve the rotation.

Wilcoxson, a charter member of the Platte Valley VFW and sr. vice commander of the American Legion, knows how important the organizations are for veterans like himself.

"The organizations speak up for those people to get the benefits they deserve," said Wilcoxson. They work together to talk to the politicians, said Wilcoxson.

Wilcoxson said he is grateful to see that the Iraq and Afghanistan veterans are welcomed home in a positive way. When Wilcoxson returned home, soldiers who were silver and bronze star recipients didn't dare go into public with their uniforms on because they were afraid of what might have happened.

Wilcoxson said not a day, since 1968, goes by that he doesn't think or relive what he went through in Vietnam.

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THANK YOU VETERANS!



Saratoga Sun's 2020 Veterans Day Section HONORING ALL WHO SERVED

Is this the country the Founders envisioned?

Winner of local Voice of Democracy looks at how party politics affect the United States

**Editor's Note* The Platte Valley VFW recently judged local entries for Voice of Democracy. In lieu of Veterans' Day assemblies announcing the winners, 1st place is being published here. Jaden Campbell won a \$500 scholarship and will move on to the state competition.*

by Jaden Campbell

In 1796, George Washington stepped away from his position of power. He noted in his Farewell Address that the American people needed to hold on to the foundations in which the country was built upon as they moved forward in this new era of history. Most imperatively, he stated that, "The alternate domination of one faction over another, sharpened by the spirit of revenge, natural to party dissention, which in different ages and countries has the most horrid enormities, is itself a frightful despotism." This was

a reminder that political division is a dangerous vice. It was also a warning that while unity was not possible without dissention, strict party lines would be the end of innovation and change for a country that was created upon the ideals of freedom for all. Americans should have heeded this warning with more intent, as the vision that the Founders had for this country has disappeared under the party lines that now define us.

Modern America has become a battleground of opinions and ideas. In fact, a poll conducted by the Pew Research Center in 2016 found that 1 in 4 Americans have expressed hatred or unfavourability towards the opposing political party. Innovation is built upon the cornerstone of change. Yet this change has been stunted and deformed by overt party divisiveness and hatred. Through compromise, the opinions that divide our beliefs can address important solutions

to the problems that we face. How can America move forward for the betterment of the people when the country is being torn apart at the seams? When your neighbor is your enemy and you have turned against your friend for their beliefs, progress becomes impossible as the divide deepens.

The Founders had not wished for such a fate for the nation they had built. Though much strife occurred as documents such as the Constitution were written, the understanding of compromise and acceptance was an important staple. Take for example the Bill of Rights. If the solidarity between the Federalists and Anti-Federalists had not existed, then individual liberties could have been suppressed by a government with absolute power. Our strength comes in our ability to look past man's faults to reach for change. Change cannot occur when political groups are too busy arguing to look

for answers to the problems that we face. America should not be directed solely by one individualistic philosophy. We should not and cannot ignore the advice of our opponents for our own selfish gain. The Founders understood this, but it seems we are unable to.

Though some might say that political division is what has defined America and that it is important that we all maintain our separate opinions, the difference between political division for the sake of progress and political division for the sake of strife must be noted. Unity is not possible without some form of dissent. Opposing views can lead to greater compromise as all party's work together. It is only when political division is used for the sake of strife that it becomes harmful to progress. When you are only attacking your opponent because you wish for them to fail, then you are fundamentally against progress as you blind

yourself to possibility.

The Founders saw America as a vision of liberty, of opportunity and possibility. As Americans we are world leaders of our fields and are pioneers of innovation and success. Yet it seems we have let down this vision that was presented by our Founders. We have let down our flag and those who have fought to maintain the liberties that we hold dear. The revolutions that have defined us have faded as we have twisted our beliefs and tied them to political parties that refuse to change. Change has been our savior, yet we revoke it today as we fight our brothers. We must work together to create a brighter future. We must work together to hold onto the vision that the founders laid out for this nation. This vision is still possible if we look towards compromise and follow the example of those who have fought for this incredible nation that is America.

What is Patriotism to Me?

Winner of local Patriot's Pen writes about what patriotism means

**Editor's Note* The Platte Valley VFW recently judged local Patriot's Pen essays. In lieu of announcing the winners at a Veterans' Day assembly, 1st place is being published here. Carley Scopis was awarded a \$150 scholarship and will move on to the state competition.*

by Carley Scopis

The Founding Fathers started the United States of America. Now it is our job as Americans to take ownership and responsibility for our country. Do you think our Fathers would be happy with

our country today? I think they would be pleased by all the patriots who work so hard for America, whether it's fighting for it, feeding it, or on the front lines saving citizen's lives. This is America to me.

Look past the cities and see fields of corn, pumpkins, and apple trees. See people plowing the fields and picking the goods. Those are farmers, men and women who help by feeding America. This makes them Patriots.

Past there see a white truck with blue writing that says United States Post Office. A mailman holds a little white

envelope. A young girl runs to get it. It is a note from her father serving overseas. The mailman knows that he just gave that girl something special. He is an American Patriot.

Find a schoolhouse in a small town. Look in a window to see a teacher in the classroom with a piece of chalk in her hand, teaching the bright-eyed kids sitting at desks. She's teaching them that they can become the future of America just by being citizens. Teachers are American Patriots.

A few blocks from the

schoolhouse is a building with black and white cars topped with colored lights parked outside. See the officers there, breathing heavily and sweating. They are talking about how they caught a thief who tried to steal the town's money. Police are American Patriots.

Finally across the street is a big white building with a bold red cross in front of it. Sounds of an ambulance wail down the road. Doctors and nurses rush out to help the injured patient. Every doctor and nurse dedicates their lives to save every patient, making

sure they go home to their families again. That makes our medical workers American Patriots.

You don't have to be a soldier in war or the President of our country. Just be a good citizen, doing your part for America. Anyone who commits to their country has a passion to be a Patriot. Patriots are the people who told the British that they wanted freedom so they could have their own rights and voices. Today, in our world, Patriots are everyone who loves, cares, and devotes themselves to America. That's what patriotism means to me.



THANK YOU VETERANS!