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CHANGING OF THE GUARD

SMITH NAMED NEW ODVA DIRECTOR

PHOTO BY NICOLE HOEFT

Cameron Smith (left), ODVA's new director, pending an Oregon Senate confirmation in early-March, spoke along with Governor Kitzhaber (center) and other members of the legislator at Jim Willis's (right) retirement gathering at the Capitol on February 27.

IRAQ VETERAN NAMED NEW ODVA DIRECTOR

By Mike Allegre

It could be described as a rare changing of the guard at the Oregon Department of Veterans' Affairs — the passing of the torch — as Cameron Smith steps in as the agency's ninth director in its 68-year history.

"Cameron brings extensive management and leadership experience and a deep respect for the ODVA team and their important work," Kitzhaber said in a prepared statement. "His passion, energy, education, and experience serving our country during wartime gives me every confidence he will further ODVA's mission to honor and serve all of Oregon's veterans."

A captain in the U.S. Marine Corps, Smith previously served as the senior policy advisor for military and veterans' affairs for both Kitzhaber and Gov. Ted Kulongoski.

Smith served five years on active duty and had three deployments to Iraq. During his final tour he served as a company commander.

Described by many as exceptionally articulate and forward thinking, Smith, 34, will become ODVA's

(SEE NEW DIRECTOR ON PAGE 4)

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

2 WWII Memorial Honor Day at the Capitol
3 Jim Willis Retires After 48 Years of Service
4 Vietnam War: 40 Years Later
5 Oregon Linked to USS Pueblo Incident
6 Wyden Thanks Korean War Veteran
6 Veterans Volunteer to Help Widow
7 Vets' Stories Archived for Library of Congress
8 Historic VA Decision on Burial Issue
9 North Salem JROTC Unit Volunteers
10 Native American Veterans Memorial
11 March: National Women's History Month

Director's Message

Cameron Smith, Oregon Department of Veterans' Affairs

VETERANS' WORK NOT A LONE WOLF MISSION

I am honored and humbled to be Governor Kitzhaber's nominee for the next director of the Oregon Department of Veterans' Affairs.

As a policy advisor in the Governor's Office, I have had the privilege over the years of working closely with the Department and its partners to serve our veterans and military families. I am excited for the opportunity to officially join the ODVA team.

At this transition, it is important that we pause and recognize where we have been. Director Jim Willis' decade of leadership corresponded with the deployment of more than two million Americans to Iraq and Afghanistan. He and the ODVA staff have worked tirelessly to help returning veterans transition back to civilian life. At the same time, we know that our work for veterans is just beginning.

Our recent veterans represent one of the nation's greatest assets, with hard-earned skills and experience, yet they continue to carry the residual effects of nearly 12 years of war. We also have aging veterans from previous eras such as Vietnam, Korea and World War II who deserve the best in care, honor, and support. We also cannot forget the service and sacrifice of our military families that are the backbone of our forces.

With current operations overseas winding down, we risk fading attention to veterans' issues. As such, we must redouble our efforts to focus support and services for their health, continuing education, and employment. We must expand and improve our outreach to all veterans and continue to grow our essential partnerships.

The challenges and opportunities we face in supporting our veterans are larger than any one agency – this is not a lone wolf mission. ODVA has tremendous partners in our County Veteran Service Offices, National Veterans' Organizations, local and federal agencies, tribal governments, state agencies, the Oregon Legislature, Congressional offices, colleges and universities, businesses and nonprofits.

I also have the deepest respect and admiration for our shared history and all previous generations who have served our state and nation.

As a proud Marine who served three tours in Iraq, I understand the unique impacts of war on our current generation of veterans. I also have the deepest respect and admiration for our shared history and all previous generations who have served our state and nation.

I look forward to working with you all to support our fellow veterans and serving as your director of ODVA. Together, I know we will make a difference in the lives of our veterans and military families.

C. Smith

WWII MEMORIAL HONOR DAY

SALEM – Members of a generation of Oregonians who endured and fought for our nation's way of life more than 65 years ago were recognized and remembered at the World War II Memorial Honor Day ceremony, Feb. 12, in the governor's ceremonial office at the Capitol.

Nearly 100 people, including 14 state legislators, gathered for the ceremony which coincided with the annual legislative visit to the Capitol by veteran groups to meet and visit with their legislators. With Gov. John Kitzhaber in Washington DC, his Senior Veteran's Policy Advisor, Cameron Smith addressed the crowd along with Sec. of State Kate Brown.

Ten World War II veterans were in attendance including the three guest speakers: Medal of Honor recipient Bob Maxwell of Bend, Lt. Col. (ret.) Leonard DeWitt, McMinnville, and World War II B-17 bomber pilot and former long-time state legislator Bill Markham, Riddle.

"Like anything worth having, it'll be a long hard road to build this," said Maxwell. "It'll take more volunteers and more money."

Markham said, "It'll honor those who died while serving and a fitting memorial. I hope this gets done before we do."

"Some (who were killed) were buried overseas and others were never found," DeWitt added. "That's why this memorial is so important to have now so all Oregonians who died in the war have their names in a place of honor."

Master of ceremonies and Memorial Foundation President Lou Jaffe closed the event by reminding attendees that spiritual leaders have said we have three obligations in life: to live, to serve and to remember.

"To our World War II veterans," Jaffe said, "you have taught us how to love our country, you have taught us how to serve our country, and now it's our turn to remember all that you and what your generation has done for us."

Reportedly 3,760 Oregonians gave their lives during the war while more than 152,000 from the state served. The memorial to honor America's "Greatest Generation" and those who were on the home front will be located in Wilson Park, west of the Capitol at Court and Cottage streets. Learn more about the memorial or make a donation at **www.oregonwwiimemorial.com**.

VETS NEWS

Published by the Oregon Department of Veterans' Affairs

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Reunions, events and story submissions are welcome, however, please note that all items are printed upon space availability. Input for the next issue must be received by **April 5.**

Up to the minute Oregon veteran news at **www.oregondva.com**

PHOTO BY MIKE ALLEGRE

After the World War II Memorial Honor Day ceremony, veterans of that war gathered around the governor's ceremonial desk (L-R): Gerry Frank, Don Guthrie, Bob Maxwell, Frank Passmore, Marv Doty, Art Sorenson, Bill Markham and Leonard DeWitt. Seated: Larry Epping.

ODVA DIRECTOR WILLIS RETIRES AFTER 48 YEARS OF PUBLIC SERVICE

SALEM — After a 48 year career in public service, including 23 years of state executive service serving under six different gubernatorial terms, Jim Willis, the director of the Oregon Department of Veterans' Affairs (ODVA) for the past nine years, has retired.

Willis announced his retirement in January after notifying Gov. John Kitzhaber in December of his decision to retire on March 1.

A native Oregonian and Vietnam veteran, Willis was born in Portland and raised in Albany. He served two enlistments as a security policeman in the U.S. Air Force, including a tour of wartime service in South Vietnam.

Willis is a retired state police administrator and long-time veteran's advocate. He served four years as the State Legislative Commission chairman for the American Legion. Nationally, he recently retired as the president of the National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs.

Following a four-year term serving on ODVA's Governor's Advisory Committee, then-Gov. Ted Kulongoski appointed Willis as the agency's director on Sept. 1, 2003.

"While these decisions are never easy," Willis told his employees, "I have determined that it's time for me to move on to the next chapter in my life. I want to thank my family who have stood by and supported me throughout my career in public service. And certainly, my thanks go to Governors Kulongoski and Kitzhaber who gave me the opportunity to lead this great department."

Willis added that he leaves ODVA "with the sure and certain belief that there is a great team in place and that you will continue to provide effective and professional service to our veterans and their families. It has been my honor to work with you in support of our mission to provide the best in services to our veterans."

Kitzhaber commended Willis for his many contributions to state and its veterans.

"For more than 48 years, Jim Willis has brought his best to public service, from the United States Air Force and the Oregon State Police to the Oregon Department of Veterans' Affairs," Kitzhaber said. "A Vietnam veteran, Jim has been a tireless supporter of veterans of all eras, including those recently home from Iraq and Afghanistan."

PHOTO BY MIKE ALLEGRE

Maj. Gen. Raymond F. Rees, Oregon's Adjutant General, presented Jim Willis the National Guard Distinguished Service Award during Willis's retirement ceremony Feb. 20 at the Anderson Readiness Center. More than 300 people attended the event in honor of Willis's service.

Willis is the ODVA's eighth director since the agency was created in 1945 by the Oregon legislature in response to a citizen mandate to provide for Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Marines returning from duty in World War II.

Among the dozens of veteran issues he has championed as ODVA's director, Willis has improved funding for the Oregon Veterans' Home, pressed for veteran health care funding under the Federal VA system, increased financing limits on veterans' home loans, supported the construction of the Oregon Medal of Honor Memorial, and Afghan-Iraqi Freedom Memorial, currently serves as vice president of the Oregon World War II Memorial Foundation, and initiated the construction of a second veterans home in Lebanon.

Willis also serves on the American Legion National Cemetery Committee as a consultant and is a former assistant inspector general for the Veterans of Foreign Wars and serves on the VFW National Resolutions Committee. A life member of the American Legion and VFW, Willis is also a member of the Non-Commissioned Officers Association and AMVETS. He is an honorary member of the Marine Corps League, the American Merchant Marine Veterans and the Military Officers Association of America.

OREGON'S FIRST AIR WAR ACE, FORMER FLYING TIGER PASSES

PHOTO COURTESY KEN JERNSTEDT, 150 YEARS OF OREGON VETERANS

Oregon's first air war ace and former Flying Tiger pilot Ken Jernstedt passed away Feb. 5 at age 95.

A Marine Corps pilot, Jernstedt resigned his officer's commission to become one the original members of the American Volunteer Group (AVG) hired by China in 1941 to protect Chinese military assets. A flight leader in the 3rd Squadron, Hells Angels, he and AVG pilots engaged the Japanese primarily over the Burma Road to assist China in resisting the invasion. Jernstedt destroyed 10.5 Japanese aircraft before and after the start of World War II.

"It'd be a CIA job today," he said in ODVA's veteran's history book. After the AVG disbanded in 1942, he became a test pilot (1943-45) for Republic Aviation in Long Island, N.Y.

Later a businessman, Jernstedt also served in the Oregon House and Senate from 1966-89 and was twice elected mayor of Hood River. "I've had such an exciting and fun life. It's been a ball," he said.

Ken Jernstedt leans on his P-40 fighter plane (No. 88) in 1942 before flying a mission with the American Volunteer Group, better known as the Flying Tigers. In the background, a Chinese civilian worker helps clean the plane.

NEW DIRECTOR FROM PAGE 1

second youngest director, pending an Oregon Senate confirmation in early-March. The youngest, William Gaarenstroom, was appointed in October 1948, after just turning 34.

"The department's staff and diverse partners work tirelessly to help returning veterans transition back to civilian life. With current operations overseas winding down, we must redouble our efforts to connect all veterans to their benefits while providing critical support and services for their health, continuing education, employment, and community," Smith said.

In January the ODVA Advisory Committee approved the governor's nomination of Smith. Coast Guard veteran Kevin Owens, the Chair of ODVA's Advisory Committee, praised the nomination saying Smith will serve as a positive connection to the veterans' community.

"His understanding of our most recent veterans' experiences and his knowledge, thoughtfulness, and respect for history will ensure a smooth transition in leadership for ODVA," Owens said. "The Advisory Committee looks forward to working with Cameron and the ODVA team to continue serving veterans of all eras."

VIETNAM WAR: LOOKING BACK 40 YEARS

Of all the wars the United States fought on foreign soil after World War II, not one seems to be comparable to the Vietnam War in terms of length and ferocity. The 10 years the U.S. military committed to Vietnam gripped the public consciousness.

President Richard Nixon announced to the nation more than 40 years ago, on Jan. 27, 1973, that an agreement known as the Paris Peace Accords had been reached to end the Vietnam War and "bring peace with honor" to Southeast Asia. It was signed in Paris, although on separate pages in order to accommodate South Vietnamese president Nguyen Van Thieu's refusal to recognize the political status of Hanoi's arm in the South, the Provisional Revolutionary government of the Republic of South Vietnam (PRG).

All troops would be withdrawn from the country within 60 days. Yet, the announcement drew mixed emotions from the 500,000 Americans who fought in the nearly decade-long war. And the war didn't end quietly or quickly.

In the war's final months, the U.S. round-the-clock bombing included the use of B-52 bombers and began on December 18. The attacks ended December 30 and negotiations resumed in early January 1973.

The agreement provided for an immediate, internationally supervised cease-fire, the withdrawal of all foreign military forces from South Vietnam, the exchange of POWs, limitations on what military assistance could be provided to Communist and non-Communist forces in the South, and formation of a National Council of Reconciliation

By the end of the war in 1973, more than 58,000 American military had lost their lives. Among those were just over 800 Oregonians.

And like any war, Vietnam also inflicted lasting trauma on its survivors. The memory of the war has haunted many veterans for decades since. Back at home, the U.S. also felt the profound social impact of the war. The war in Vietnam marked the first conflict in which battle images were beamed directly into American households via their television sets. Anti-war protests mushroomed, which partially led to the decision by Nixon to end the war.

And while it was good for the U.S. to get out of Vietnam and halt their involvement in that unpopular war, it left a large number of Americans, especially veterans, asking why America ever got involved in the first place.

By Nov. 1, 1955, following the first Indochina War, communist North Vietnam was at war with the Republic of South Vietnam backed by anti-communist countries. America's involvement escalated from an advisory through the early 1960s to U.S. troop levels tripling in 1961 and then tripling again in 1962. U.S. Combat units were deployed beginning in 1965. Operations spanned international borders and Laos and Cambodia were heavily bombed.

The U.S. involvement in the war peaked in 1968 at the time of the Tet Offensive. After this, American ground forces were gradually withdrawn as part of a policy known as Vietnamization.

While the Paris Peace Accords marked the beginning of the end of that long-running war, the agreement established only a temporary ceasefire. Under the plan, the U.S. would no longer be directly involved in the war and would pull its troops and close its bases before April 1973.

Soon news coverage of the war went from reports of U.S. fighting in Vietnam and body count figures to more positive images of returning American prisoners of war (POWs). Operation Homecoming would bring 591 American POWs back to America.

The U.S. listed about 1,350 Americans as POWs or missing in action (MIA) and roughly 1,200 Americans reported killed in action and their body not recovered. The fate of those MIA has always been one of the most troubling consequences of any war. In this case, the issue has been a highly emotional one to those involved, and is often considered the last depressing, divisive aftereffect of the Vietnam War for the United States.

One certain lesson learned from that unfortunate time in America's history is not to blame the soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines who are called on to fight these wars. In contrast to today's all-volunteer military who are welcomed home with parades and gratitude for the service, the Vietnam War was fought largely by draftees who were cursed, maligned, disrespected and spat upon when they came home.

So now, while in the midst of another war that's lasted more than 10 years, America has learned how to be grateful and proud of the brave service and sacrifice of those volunteers in military uniform. Yet, many Vietnam vets today are still awaiting that confirmation from an affirming grateful public.

To those veterans, however belated, thank you for serving and welcome home.

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In early-December 1968, the infamous "Hawaiian Good Luck sign," shown in an October propaganda photo, was the crew's reaction to the North Korean's poor treatment and propaganda efforts. The only problem was that their captors had figured it out before the sailors were released. Terrible reprisals soon followed.

OREGON LINKED TO USS PUEBLO INCIDENT

Duane Hodges

Historical wartime incidents are part of the fabric of how history is written. During the Vietnam War, one incident that resonated worldwide involved the capture of a United States Navy spy ship and the death of a sailor from Oregon.

With the U.S. battling the war in Southeast Asia on the front lines and protestors on the home front, the capture of the USS Pueblo (AGER-2) by the North Korean navy on Jan. 23, 1968 may be described as one of the Cold War's darkest moments. It would become known as the Pueblo incident or the Pueblo crisis.

For years afterwards what had happened leading up to the incident and if the crew was actually culpable isn't totally clear. Yet the 11 month ordeal that followed for 82 members of that crew caught the free world's attention when North Korea captured the sailors and held them captive for allegedly spying while operating inside North Korean waters.

The newly refitted World War II merchant ship was on its first operational mission that was conceived and tasked by the US Naval Security Group Command in Japan. It was to be a period primarily for testing. With no current information available on hostile activities by North Korean forces, the officer in charge at US CINCPACFLT assigned the mission a risk assessment of "minimal."

Following some refitting and repairs, Pueblo departed Sasebo, Japan on Jan. 11, and headed northward through the Tsushima Strait into the Sea of Japan to begin her mission; the surveillance of North Korean naval activity, the monitoring and recording of Korean coastal radars and surveillance of soviet naval units operating in the Tsushima Strait.

Radio contact between Pueblo and the Naval Security Group had been ongoing and Seventh Fleet command was soon fully aware of Pueblo's precarious and dangerous situation.

As the incident unfolded, crews from three North Korean gunboats and a sub chaser ordered Pueblo's captain, Lt. Commander Lloyd M. "Pete" Bucher, to halt. Bucher checked his bearings and announced to the North Koreans that he was in international waters. The North Korean war vessels, armed with 57mm cannons and many machine guns, signaled Bucher to "heave to or they would open fire."

Bullets then raked the ship's superstructure. A cannon round struck the radar mast and bridge wounding Bucher and two others. Orders were given to immediately destroy all classified material and go to a modified General Quarters (no hands above deck.)

Pueblo's .50 caliber guns sat mounted on the starboard and stern rails wrapped in frozen tarps. With the ammunition stored below, no attempt was made to man them.

Bucher then ordered Pueblo to follow the escorting vessels, but later the ship was stopped just outside of what the captain believed to be North Korean waters. The North Koreans once again fired upon the ship. The last salvo killed Fireman Duane D. Hodges of Creswell, Ore. and injured several other men who had been destroying documents.

Pueblo then resumed her course towards Wonsan under escort. U.S. air cover had been promised but never arrived.

After North Korean boat crews boarded Pueblo, her crew had their hands tied, they were blindfolded, beaten, and prodded with bayonets. This began an 11 month ordeal that would result in the physical and psychological torture of the crew and in particular their captain.

Some of the crew reported upon release that they were starved and regularly tortured while in North Korean custody. This treatment allegedly turned worse when the North Koreans realized that crewmen were secretly giving them "the finger" in staged propaganda photos.

Bucher was psychologically tortured. At one point he was put through a mock firing squad in an effort to make him confess. Eventually the Koreans threatened to execute his men in front of him, and Bucher relented and agreed to "confess to his and the crew's transgression."

Following an apology, a written admission by the U.S. that Pueblo had been spying, and an assurance that the U.S. would not spy in the future, the North Korean government released the 82 remaining crew members. On Dec. 23, 1968, the crew was bussed to the DMZ border with South Korea and ordered to walk south one by one across the "Bridge of No Return."

Commander Bucher led the long line of crewmen across the bridge. The U.S. then verbally retracted the ransom admission, apology, and assurance.

Bucher, his officers and crew subsequently appeared before a Navy Court of Inquiry. A court martial had been recommended for Bucher and the Officer in Charge of the Research Department, Lt. Steve Harris. Then-Secretary of the Navy, John H. Chafee, rejected the recommendation, stating, "They have suffered enough."

Bucher was never found guilty of any indiscretions and continued his Navy career until retirement. He died in Jan. 2004.

The Pueblo's website reports only 66 of the 83 original crewmen survive today. Four of those sailors were reportedly Oregon natives: Hodges, Earl M. Kisler of Canby, Kenneth R. Wadley, Woodburn, and Michael A. O'Bannon, Newberg.

A memorial bearing Hodges' name is in Creswell where he is buried.

U.S. Navy authorities and the Pueblo's crew insist that before the capture, Pueblo was miles outside North Korean territorial waters. The North Koreans claim the vessel was well within North Korean territory.

The ship's former Executive Officer, Lt. Edward R Murphy, Jr., stated years later in his book, Second in Command, that intrusion "confessions" were always prefaced with the disclaimer: "The charts and records show that we intruded at the following points." Murphy said, "In fact, the 'Charts and records' do not support the intrusions claimed by North Koreas, but show them to be navigational impossibilities."

Today, the Pueblo is the only commissioned ship of the U.S. Navy currently being held captive. It's tethered near the capital of Pyongyang, treated by the North Koreans as a war trophy.

USS PUEBLO (AGER-2)

Top: The USS Pueblo is at sea in late-1967 after being refitted in Bremerton, Wash. Named FS-344 in WW II, she was in reserve from 1954 until April 1966. Transferred to the Navy in April 1966, she was renamed Pueblo.

Bottom: The North Koreans moved Pueblo from Wonsan to Pyongyang in the late-1990s. Over the years, the ship has been painted on the port side (shown), which tourists see. The starboard side is a rusting hulk. Last December, Florida Congressman Vern Buchanan asked the House Foreign Affairs Committee to request that North Korean return the 70 year-old vessel to the U.S.

PHOTO BY SGT. CORY GROGAN, OREGON MILITARY DEPARTMENT

Oregon Sen. Ron Wyden presents Jim "Jimbo" Fagundes with a framed copy of a U.S. Senate resolution officially proclaiming 2012-2013 as the year of the Korean War veteran. Wyden visited the Nesmith Readiness Center in Dallas, Ore., Jan. 15, for a Polk County town hall meeting and ceremony honoring Korean War veterans. The resolution was passed on Nov. 27, 2012.

WYDEN THANKS KOREAN WAR VETS

DALLAS — While visiting the Oregon National Guard's Nesmith Readiness Center in Dallas for a Polk County town hall meeting on Jan. 15, Oregon Sen. Ron Wyden took part in a ceremony honoring Korean War veterans.

A strong supporter of the military, veterans and the Oregon National Guard, Wyden took the opportunity to recognize Korean War veterans in the wake of the U.S. Senate passing a declaration on Nov. 27, 2012, officially calling 2012-2013 the year of the Korean War veteran. The commemoration is occurring on the 60th anniversary of end of the Korean War and to honor contributions and sacrifices made by that war's veterans.

Korean War veteran Jim "Jimbo" Fagundes proudly accepted a framed copy of the resolution from Wyden on behalf of Korean War veterans and said he felt like he was walking on air after receiving it.

"This is for the all the veterans of the Korean War," Fagundes said. "There were 53,000 men lost over there, and we pray for their families and pray for the veterans that are still with us."

Wyden said the Korean War has always been considered the forgotten war and we don't believe it should be forgotten. "It was time to again say thank you for your service and sacrifice."

The town hall was Wyden's 652nd in Oregon and is part of a commitment by the senator to hold at least one town hall political forum in every Oregon County, every year.

DOD CERTIFICATES OF APPRECIATION FOR KOREAN WAR VETERANS

To honor their service and to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the end of the Korean War, the Department of Defense is issuing certificates of appreciation for a Korean War veteran or their family.

To order the certificates visit **www.koreanwar60.com/webform/official-dod-certificate-appreciation-form**

PHOTO COURTESY OF MARK LEN/ALBANY DEMOCRAT-HERALD

Above: At the house of Chris Engwall, dry wall installer Tony Frey (center) of Lebanon talks with Mike Kinser of Albany (left) about the refurbishing project.

Right: Chris Engwall, with grandson Mitchell Cragget and her daughter Tana Nicholson, views her newly renovated bedroom.

PHOTO COURTESY OF ALBANY DEMOCRAT-HERALD

VETERANS VOLUNTEER TO REVAMP HOME OF KOREAN WAR VETS WIDOW

Reprinted with permission of the Albany Democrat-Herald

LEBANON — Victor Kuhns didn't know Chris Engwall before he started a remodeling project at her home in Lebanon this fall.

But Kuhns, the founder of the Albany-area volunteer group Vets Helping Vets HQ, did know that Engwall's husband, the late Charles Engwall, was an artillery soldier during the Korean War. When he learned his widow needed help, he didn't need to know anything else.

"We'll never leave a brother behind," he said.

Charles Engwall, a longtime pastor, died in 2007. The family's 35-year-old ranch-style home on 15th Street was in need of a makeover to be wheelchair accessible for Mrs. Engwall, 85, who is recovering from complications following back surgery.

So, Vets Helping Vets joined forces with Home Depot, members of Albany American Legion Post 10, the Oregon National Guard, and several other veterans and volunteers to make the necessary changes free of charge.

Home Depot provided all the materials, and veterans either performed or arranged for the labor, all of which was donated. Aquatech, GMA Construction and Tony Frey Drywall were among the contributors. Robin Bauer put in the linoleum, Post 10 Commander Brock Bursey took on the plumbing, and several National Guard veterans moved furniture.

Saturday afternoon, veterans, volunteers and Home Depot representatives were on hand to welcome Engwall home from Corvallis Manor, where she has been undergoing rehabilitation.

"This is to honor your husband and what he has done for this country, and what he has given, and also the sacrifices you've given when he was gone," Kuhns told Engwall. "This is just a little bit of what we can give back."

Engwall beamed as her wheelchair rolled smoothly over new carpet, through newly widened doorways, and past a bathroom with a pedestal sink, handicapped-accessible toilet and soon-to-be-installed shower.

"This is wonderful! I think I'm in the wrong house!" she exclaimed. "This is so beautiful, so clean! I can't believe it."

Engwall had been home from the hospital just once following her September surgery, at Thanksgiving, said daughter Wendy Rench of California. She should be mobile again in about a year, Rench said, but the doctor told her in the meantime, she wouldn't be allowed to live at home permanently until the doorways and bathrooms could accommodate a wheelchair.

Engwall's other daughter, Tana Nicholson of Lebanon, did her best to find help, but the work wasn't something the family could get done on its own.

The project came together when Nicholson reached Claudia Kerlegan, family assistance specialist and a contractor with the Oregon National Guard. Kerlegan connected her with Kuhns and Bursey. Kuhns contacted Home Depot, which frequently does community service projects.

Bonnie Stephenson, department supervisor and Team Depot captain for the Corvallis branch of Home Depot, responded immediately.

"Next thing I know, I decided we were going to take care of this for this lovely lady," Stephenson said of Engwall, whom she now calls Grandma. "Grandma's adopted now."

Home Depot has done a couple of projects with Vets Helping Vets, but nothing this big, Stephenson added. "It's all about community. I'm fortunate to work with people who have a big heart."

Volunteers at the party said they never thought twice about helping the family of a fellow veteran.

Explained Bursey: "We're all brothers and sisters in arms."

VOLUNTEER ARCHIVES VETERANS' STORIES FOR LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

By Ron Halvorson - Reprinted by permission of the Central Oregonian

Ramona McCallister

PRINEVILLE — Florence Green, the last verified veteran of World War I, died earlier this year in England, and of the 16 million American men and women who served in World War II, less than 1.5 million of these veterans remain, according to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

The National World War II Museum estimates that every 90 seconds a veteran from that war passes.

With each death comes the permanent loss of that veteran's experiences, which is why, in 2002, the U.S. Congress authorized the Veterans History Project. Veterans of any war are invited to tell their stories, which are documented — generally through audio or video means, but also on paper — and then archived in the U.S. Library of Congress.

It was a project that piqued the interest of Ramona McCallister, who at the time was a video instructor at Crook County High School. Six veterans were interviewed during her tenure.

"It turned out to be a great project," McCallister related. "Those veterans would come in, talk to the students, and the kids were riveted. It really comes alive when you hear it (first-hand) from somebody. We heard some incredible stories from people, and we had no idea that they had done that."

At least locally, the project lapsed when she became a reporter for the Central Oregonian. However, after she consulted with the Bowman Museum for their purchase of professional-grade video gear — and volunteered to help document local history — her interest was rekindled.

"Once we had the equipment," said the museum's director, Gordon Gillespie, "and she started putting out feelers on folks to interview, she herself kind of discovered this cache of veterans, and it fit our mission of capturing people's stories, and archiving them here."

"I kind of picked up where I left off," said McCallister. "I started archiving veteran's stories again, using the format of the Veteran's project, and also getting the stories for the benefit of the museum."

She's completed 13 video interviews (through February) — 10 with veterans and three of others with a local historical perspective. All will be archived not only in the museum, but also in the Library of Congress. She values the experiences and stories of the veterans, but there's an even more personal motivation.

"My dad was a Korean veteran," she said. "We didn't know hardly anything about his time in the Korean War. We didn't know that he had six or seven medals. As a child, I didn't think of the importance of asking him those questions. Now, I can't get those stories back."

The Band of Brothers, a local group of veterans, has been "very helpful" in finding people who are willing to be interviewed, McCallister said, but not everyone is eager to go on camera.

"What I'm seeing is it's not something every veteran wants to talk about," she said. "And after you talk to them, you kind of understand why. War's not a pretty thing. It's not an easy thing to go through some of the things men and women have gone through and (then) talk about it."

McCallister said she'll honor someone's desire if they don't want to be interviewed, but most really appreciate a chance to tell their story. Many have unfounded concerns, though, about how much they'll remember after six decades.

PHOTO COURTESY OF CENTRAL OREGONIAN

Veteran Denny Thomas, of Prineville, is interviewed by Ramona McCallister.

"It's amazing," she said. "You get them to talking, you get them comfortable, and they just remember details. They just remember it so clearly."

Perhaps not remembered so clearly are their personal exploits, or so it would seem.

"They don't brag about their accomplishments," she said. "They might have saved 10 people, and they would never tell you that. It's like, 'That was my job. I'd do it again. It was no big deal.'"

George Browning, a local veteran who was featured in a Pearl Harbor story, is a case in point.

"He was so humble about his contribution to that part of the war," McCallister said. "Later I found out that he got a considerable number of medals. He never once said anything about it. A lot of these war veterans are like that."

Those who share their stories do so for different reasons. Local WWII veteran Ray Demaris fought in Okinawa, the last major battle of that war. He said things happened during that battle "that we wouldn't even talk about."

"There're only a few people that know about it," he said, "so if they (the public) want to know, I'll tell them. They ought to know what the war was. It wasn't no picnic, I know that."

Another WWII veteran, Denny Thomas — who agreed to do an interview for McCallister "because she asked me" — is completely supportive of her efforts.

"I think the value of these interviews is to preserve some of the recollections of veterans, particularly as they age," he said. "Their stories will soon be untold unless they're recorded here very soon."

Gillespie concurred.

"As with a family, we wished we asked more questions," he said. "As a society, a community, this plays the same role. Once the people have passed, all that information goes with them. So capturing that information, archiving it, for not only today's generation, but generations to come, is a great way to understand and appreciate lifestyles of bygone times."

"There is a tremendous value in documenting the stories of these brave men and women veterans, who sacrificed so much for our freedom," echoed McCallister. "Their stories are a part of American history that should not be forgotten. By documenting their stories, I feel like I am honoring their service and their contributions to our country."

McCallister's project is a daunting task by any measure, not only because of the time required, but because of the sheer number of potential subjects.

"This is just five veterans (interviewed to date) out of more than 200 in (just) the Band of Brothers," she said. "In this town, there are a lot of veterans and veterans' organizations — more than I thought — and everybody's story is just as relevant and important as the next. I hope that I can do lots more."

Every veteran has a story – men, women, all ages, and in all wars. If you want to share your story, contact Gordon Gillespie at the Bowman Museum, 541-447-3715, or e-mail bowmuse@netscape.net.

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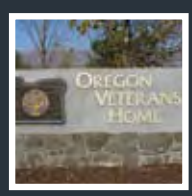

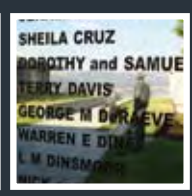

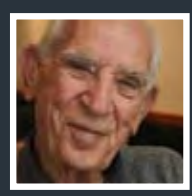
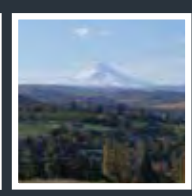

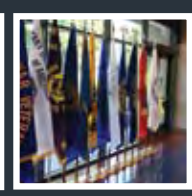

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Not only does the Home accept monetary donations, but gifts such as magazine subscriptions, books, blankets, and personal items. If you are interested in donating your time as a volunteer, please contact the Home at 541-296-7152.

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HISTORIC VA DECISION: VA ALLOWS BURIAL FOR SAME-SEX OREGON COUPLE

WASHINGTON DC — It is believed to be the first case of its kind, allowing the same-sex spouse of a military veteran to be buried in a national cemetery. For retired Lt. Col. Linda Campbell of Eugene, it was an answer to an official request she made to the VA after her long-time domestic partner Nancy Lynchild died in December of metastatic cancer.

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) released a statement on Feb. 13, saying VA Secretary Eric K. Shinseki used his discretionary authority and personally approved the request. The VA administers national cemeteries. Shinseki's decision applies just to Campbell and Lynchild and does not represent an official change in policy.

"This was the first non-veteran partner of the same gender he was asked to consider, this is the first he has approved," the statement read. "It's important to note that the Secretary did not base his decision on the individual's marital status or state recognized relationship status, but rather based it, in part, on evidence of a committed relationship between the individual and the veteran."

Though gay military members can now serve openly, the military does not formally recognize same-sex marriage under the federal Defense of Marriage Act. Passed in 1996, the act bars federal recognition of same-sex marriages and says other states cannot be forced to recognize them.

"I am deeply grateful to my country for honoring and respecting my years of service and my relationship with Nancy, the love of my life," Campbell said. "Willamette National Cemetery is a beautiful, peaceful place. Knowing that Nancy and I can join my parents on that hallowed ground is a source of great comfort and healing."

During her 25-year military career, Campbell served in the National Guard and Reserve. She was an Air Force recruiter, a military aide to the Oregon governor and served on the Governor's Military Advisory Council. During the Vietnam War, her duties included Air Force casualty notification for Colorado.

Lynchild worked as a home repair specialist and as director of housing with the Housing and Community Services Agency of Lane County, according to a statement from Campbell, Oregon Sen. Jeff Merkley and Oregon Labor Commissioner Brad Avakian.

Merkley applauded Shinseki's decision saying, "I can only hope that this historic moment is just the first of many for same-sex couples across the nation. All our veterans deserve the honor of being buried in a national cemetery with their partners by their side."

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NORTH SALEM JROTC UNIT MAINTAINS AIF MEMORIAL

By Mike Allegre

SALEM — For members of North Salem High School's Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps (JROTC) unit, volunteering to clean and maintain the Afghan-Iraqi Freedom Memorial is a public service they place a high priority on.

That is why each week volunteers from the Viking Battalion make a five-block trip after school to the Oregon Department of Veterans' Affairs grounds, break out cleaning supplies and materials, and step into the Memorial's pool to clean it so it will look like new.

"Service to our community is doing something that will make it better," said the unit's Alpha Company Commander, Jed Adams. "This isn't something we're doing for show or that we do for praise or accolades. We chose this project because it needed to be done and we wanted to do it."

A senior, Adams related that Mother Nature takes her toll on the overall memorial: the polished aluminum global map, the blue painted pool surface, the outer railings, the statue and memorial face with the names of Oregon's fallen inscribed on it--all of it needs care and cleaning.

Adams and his first sergeant, fellow senior Zack Bock, discovered the need around Veterans Day 2012 when all 215 Viking Battalion cadets took a field trip to the Memorial Park.

"It is a lovely, inspiring place," Bock said. "But it was clear to us that we could help keep it clean and well-maintained."

After researching the need and coordinating with ODVA officials, the cadets of Company A went to work in January. "We all do specific jobs on this project and we enjoy being out here as a team, involved in an important task," Adams added.

The school's JROTC unit is most noted for their precision color guard units that serve nearly year-round at many events in the mid-valley and in Portland, including at high school sports events, the state Capitol and Trail Blazer games.

Their excellence in other areas has also earned the battalion the Army's "Honor Unit with Distinction" award for 13 straight years.

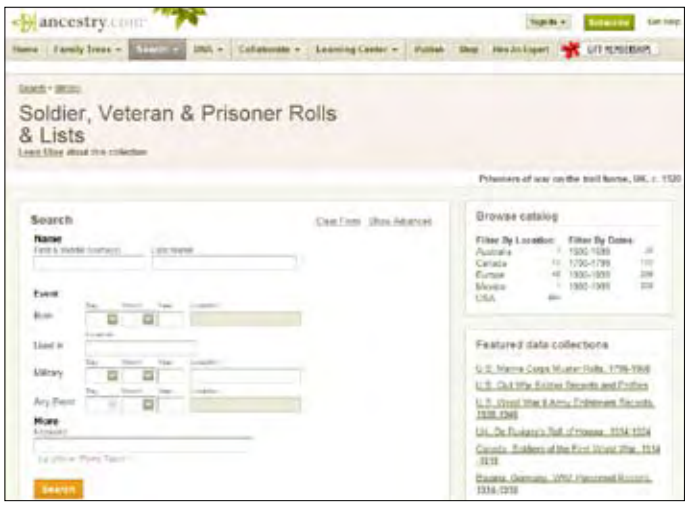
Along with their service at the memorial comes the learning and then reflecting on what was accomplished.

As a group they have learned why and how the memorial came to be, the names of the more than 130 fallen it honors, and why it's there.

"And we're each tracing names from the Oregon Medal of Honor Memorial," Adams said. "We're researching the recipient and doing a detailed report on that person so we know who they were and why their history is important."

North Salem High School JROTC cadet Sabrina Lesky polishes the aluminum map inside the Afghan-Iraqi Freedom Memorial in Salem. Viking Battalion volunteers clean the memorial on the ODVA grounds each week.

VA, ANCESTRY.COM TO INDEX HISTORIC BURIAL RECORDS



WASHINGTON — An internet-based genealogy research firm and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) have partnered to bring burial records from historic national cemetery ledgers into the digital age. By combining the efforts of *Ancestry.com* and the VA, the collection—predominantly of Civil War interments—will be made accessible to researchers and *Ancestry.com* subscribers undertaking historical and genealogical research.

From the 1860s until the mid-20th century, U.S. Army personnel tracked national cemetery burials in hand-written burial ledgers or "registers." Due to concern for the fragile documents and a desire to expand public access to the ledger contents, VA's National Cemetery Administration (NCA) duplicated about 60 hand-written ledgers representing 36 cemeteries using a high-resolution scanning process.

The effort resulted in high quality digital files that reproduced approximately 9,344 pages and 113,097 individual records. NCA then transferred the original ledgers to the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) where they will be preserved. In addition to the NCA's ledgers, NARA was already the steward of at least 156 military cemetery ledgers transferred from the Army years ago.

In 2011, NCA initiated a partnership with *Ancestry.com* to index its cemetery ledgers, allowing the data to be searched or browsed in a variety of ways. *Ancestry.com* spent more than 600 hours indexing NCA's records at no charge to the government.

"We are excited to be able to share this wealth of primary documentation," said VA's Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs Steve L. Muro. "With the help of Ancestry.com, we have opened the doors to thousands of service members' histories through the information contained in these burial ledgers."

Ancestry.com has assembled the digitized and indexed NCA burial ledgers with those at NARA into a new collection, "U.S. Burial Registers, Military Posts and National Cemeteries, 1862-1960." The burial records contain information such as name, rank, company/regiment, date of death, age at death, date of burial and grave number. A large number of Civil War soldiers were buried where they fell in battle or in temporary cemeteries, and sometimes that information, along with religious affiliation, can be found in the ledgers.

The collection was posted on the *Ancestry.com* website on Veterans Day 2012. The information can be accessed free of charge by VA personnel and by employees of the other federal agencies that maintain national cemeteries, the Departments of the Interior and Defense. Ledger data will also be available for free at all NARA facilities, and at public libraries that subscribe to *Ancestry.com*. The general public will have access to the database on their personal devices through *Ancestry.com's* regular subscription service.

NEW VA ONLINE RESOURCES FOR FUNERAL DIRECTORS

Eagle Point National Cemetery, Eagle Point, OR

WASHINGTON — Funeral directors nationwide now have access to a new online resource kit they may use when helping veterans and their families make burial arrangements in VA national cemeteries.

The Department of Veterans Affairs announced in January a website created to enable funeral directors to find the most pertinent information to help families plan burials and apply for VA memorial benefits quickly. It has links about eligibility, benefits and services plus videos and information regarding services offered with and without military funeral honors.

"We recognize that veterans and their families need compassion when they approach funeral directors for help," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki. "We want to assist directors by giving them the information and tools they need to aid these families."

VA maintains 3.2 million gravesites in 131 VA national cemeteries and interred more than 118,000 veterans and family members in 2012.

The new website can be found at **www.cem.va.gov/cem/funeraldirector.asp**.

Retired Navy and Air Force veteran Bill Stam stands in front of the All Nations Native American Veterans Memorial he and his wife Gwin have proudly displayed on their property.

NATIVE AMERICAN VETERANS MEMORIAL HONORS ALL

JEFFERSON — Bill Stam and friend Jay Bear had just finished delivering 250 donated boxes of much needed clothing and blankets to members of the Sioux nation at a nearby reservation in Pine Ridge, S.D. when on their return home they spotted the statue at a restaurant in Montana of life size statue of an American Indian riding a horse while trying to take down a pair of buffalo with a spear. He wasn't looking to purchase a statue but noticed a sale sign and Bear told Stam he should buy it and put it in his front yard.

When he returned home in Jefferson, Ore., Stam showed the pictures of the statue to his wife, Gwin. "She told me we should make a memorial for all Native American veterans," Stam said, "so, she used her cookie jar money to help make it happen."

Three weeks later, after negotiating with the owner, Stam and pal Gary Cherry returned with another load of clothing, this time to a Blackfoot reservation in northern Montana last August. On the way back, Stam stopped and purchased the huge the 3,000 pound statue for an undisclosed price. The fiber glass statue, which measures 15-feet long, 14-feet high and 80-inches wide, was hoisted on to a flatbed trailer and the men drove it home.

The Stams' erected the All Nations Native American Veterans Memorial last year and believe it really belongs to those for whom it is dedicated -- American Indian veterans everywhere and for Native American firefighters and police officers.

"We're just the keepers of this memorial," Stam said. "I believe it is the only one open to the public that pays respects to all Native American nations, tribes and bands in the United States. There are other memorials, but those are on reservations and only honor members of that tribe. Now there are nine Native American memorials.

A Korean War combat Navy veteran (1952-56) and an Air Force veteran (1957-65), who served in the Vietnam War, Stam completed 24 years in the military and retired as a loadmaster and rigger aboard C-124 and C-141 cargo planes. He was called back to active duty from the Air Force Reserve after the USS Pueblo was captured in January 1968. He later returned to Reserve duty and served until retiring in 1983.

The memorial will not officially open until April 20, at 2 p.m., but people are welcome to come a view it. Stan said they receive visitors every weekend.

Lighted flag poles, donated by the Santiam VFW Post 4065 and private parties, allow the U.S., state, POW and tribal flags to fly 24/7. A small water feature highlights two slate tablets which will hold the names of American Indian veterans and the other will have names of the special sponsors that have helped make the memorial possible. Gwin is painting panels that will hang inside two teepees, located in behind the memorial, that portray tribal culture.

"We have vets from North Carolina, New York South Dakota, Arizona, Oklahoma, and will have over 50 names by March," he said.

Stam said they have had tremendous support from the city of Jefferson, the city council, and local VFW Post 4065. He added that the memorial's Facebook page has had nearly 120,000 views from 30 countries. Funds are needed for maintenance and upkeep. The couple soon hopes to become a nonprofit organization.

Veterans may contact Stam at 541-327-2949, to learn more about submitting their information for a plaque. They must provide their names, tribal affiliation, city, branch of service and if they received any medals.

Individuals, families or businesses donating $100 or more will have their name placed at the memorial. Native American veterans making a donation of $35 or more will have their names inscribed on a 2-inch by 4-inch plaque. The statue is located off of I-5 at exit 238, at 3375 Cemetery Hill Road.

MILITARY CONVENTIONS, REUNIONS AND EVENTS

15th Medical Battalion, 1st Air Cav – The association will hold its 16th reunion in Old Sacramento, CA, April 17-20, at the Holiday Inn. Open to all former unit members, including all Companies and Medevac Platoon.

Contact: James Calibro, 209-573-0701 or www.15thmedassociation.com

1st Battalion, 50th Infantry Reunion – The Association will hold their reunion April 30-May 3, at Fort Benning, GA. Register separately for the Association Convention. Hotel reservations: Hampton Inn & Suites, Phenix City, AL. Reserve by April 5: 866-799-3642.

Information: www.ichiban1.org/html/reunion.htm

Military Order of the Purple Heart, Dept. of Oregon Convention – The Department's 68th annual convention is being held Sat., June 8, in Roseburg, Windmill Inn, 1450 NW Mulholland Dr. All Purple Heart recipients, their families or friends are welcome. Guest speaker: TBA.

Contact: Robert Haltiner, 503-704-3483, rhaltiner7085@msn.com

351st Bomb Group (H) US Army Air Corps, 8th Air Force – Will hold their 37th annual reunion in Portland at the Red Lion on the River, June 20-23. Hotel reservations: 503-283-4466 or 800-RED-LION. Mention the reunion to receive a discounted rate. Many activities, tours, entertainment, a banquet. Registration no later than May 20.

Contact: Deborah Eason, 478-453-7388, dbme@windstream.net , www.351st.org

Screaming Eagles - 101st Airborne Division Assoc. 71st Reunion – The annual reunion is Aug. 14-17, at Red Lion Hotel, 909 N. Hayden Island Dr., Portland.

Contact: Jerry Gomes, 503-668-6127 or www.ScreamingEagle.org or Jim Bray, 503-913-7058

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Hazel Ah Ying Lee, WASP classmates Alice J. Starr and Virginia Hagerstrom pause during their training in Sweetwater, Texas.

NATIONAL WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH:
OREGON'S HAZEL AH YING LEE: 1ST FEMALE CHINESE-AMERICAN PILOT

During World War II, a select group of young women pilots became pioneers, heroes, and role models. They were the members the Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP) -- the first women in history trained to fly American military aircraft.

The war was an historical time and aviation history was rewritten as nearly 1,100 WASP served their nation during the 1940s. Portland native Hazel Ah Ying Lee added to that historical chapter when she became the first Chinese-American woman to fly a military plane and one of the few women to die in the line of duty.

"This is not a time when women should be patient. We are in a war and we need to fight it with all our ability and ever weapon possible. Women pilots, in this particular case, are a weapon waiting to be used."

-First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, 1942

Lee fell in love with flying at a time when less than one percent of American pilots were women. After earning her pilot's license in 1932, Lee couldn't serve in the U.S. Army Air Corps, so she wanted to fly for the Chinese Air Force against Japan. Yet, there too, she was not allowed to fly for the Chinese. Lee remained in China until 1938 and contributed to that nation's war effort in other ways.

Upon returning to New York City, Lee worked for the Chinese government as a buyer of war materials for China, but by 1943, she learned about an opportunity to fly military aircraft as a WASP. She applied and was accepted to begin formal training at Avenger Field in Sweetwater, Texas.

Lee was considered by her peers to be a fine aviator with an added strong, fun personality. Former WASP Anna (Flynn) Monkiewicz, 93, of The Dalles was stationed with Lee in Michigan. She recalls the Portland native as being a prankster and a nice person.

"Once while she was in a restaurant with a bunch of the girls, Hazel pretended not to understand English and ordered in Chinese," Monkiewicz said. "It was funny because the waiter wasn't sure what to do. I flew with her on a few missions from Michigan, but usually she was flying planes in one direction and I flew in another. She was a very good pilot."

During one training flight, Lee made an emergency landing in a farmer's field in Kansas. Mistaking her for a Japanese pilot, the farmer held her at "pitchfork point." She finally stood her ground, told the farmer who she was and demanded that he put the pitchfork down. He complied.

After graduating (Class 43 W-4) on Aug. 7, 1943, Lee joined the Air Transport Command's 3rd Ferrying Squadron at Romulus, Michigan and began ferrying trainer and liaison type aircraft. She and Monkiewicz were two of only 134 WASP to complete Pursuit School which allowed them to ferry advanced fighter aircraft.

In late-November 1944, she was to fly a new Bell P-63 King Cobra to Great Falls, Mont. As a large number of P-63's approached the airport at the same time, there was confusion in the control tower. While landing, Lee's plane and another P-63 collided. She survived the fiery crash, but died from the burns she received in the accident.

Only three days after learning of Lee's death, her family received another telegram. Lee's brother, Victor had been killed in combat in France while serving with the U.S. Army Tank Corps.

As the family made funeral preparations they chose a burial site in Portland. Yet, the cemetery refused to allow the family to bury Hazel and Victor in the chosen spot, citing cemetery policy that did not allow Asians to be buried "in the White section."

After a lengthy battle, the Lee family prevailed and the female aviatrix was laid to rest in a non-military funeral. She buried alongside her brother on a sloping hill in Riverview Cemetery.

Her death at age 32 made Lee's personal history a little sadder. She was in love and had agreed to marry a man in China when the war ended. Although they had not yet wed, she listed him as next-of-kin on her WASP personnel records. It took nearly a year before military officials could locate this man to notify him of Lee's death. He was serving in the mobile Chinese army.

Lee, one of 30 Oregonians who completed WASP flight training, was the last of the 38 WASP to die in service to their country. In her lifetime, she flew more than 70 different aircraft and died doing what she loved: flying.

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CHANGING OF THE GUARD

SMITH NAMED NEW ODVA DIRECTOR

Cameron Smith (left), ODVA's new director, pending an Oregon Senate confirmation in early March, spoke along with Governor Kitzhaber (center) and other members of the legislator at Jim Willis's (right) retirement gathering at the Capitol on February 27.

IRAQ VETERAN NAMED NEW ODVA DIRECTOR

By Mike Allegre

It could be described as a rare changing of the guard at the Oregon Department of Veterans' Affairs — the passing of the torch — as Cameron Smith steps in as the agency's ninth director in its 68-year history.

"Cameron brings extensive management and leadership experience and a deep respect for the ODVA team and their important work," Kitzhaber said in a prepared statement. "His passion, energy, education, and experience serving our country during wartime gives me every confidence he will further ODVA's mission to honor and serve all of Oregon's veterans."

A captain in the U.S. Marine Corps, Smith previously served as the senior policy advisor for military and veterans' affairs for both Kitzhaber and Gov. Ted Kulongoski.

Smith served five years on active duty and had three deployments to Iraq. During his final tour he served as a company commander.

Described by many as exceptionally articulate and forward thinking, Smith, 34, will become ODVA's

(SEE NEW DIRECTOR ON PAGE 4)

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

2 WWII Memorial Honor Day at the Capitol
3 Jim Willis Retires After 48 Years of Service
4 Vietnam War: 40 Years Later
5 Oregon Links to USS Pueblo
6 Wyden Thanks Korean War Veteran
6 Veterans Volunteer to Help Widow
7 Vet's Stories Archived for Library of Congress
8 Historic VA Decision on Burial Issue
9 North Salem JROTC Unit Volunteers
10 Native American Veterans Memorial
11 March: National Women's History Month