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THE
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2024



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WILLIAM ‘BILL’ SCOTT

THE
DISPATCH

Army • First Lieutenant

On Easter Sunday in 1952, William “Bill” Scott had just gotten to the Yalu River in North Korea with his platoon.

“What we didn’t know was we were outnumbered 10 to one,” he said. “I was trying to protect my radio sergeant and got cut on the left side of my throat by a bayonet. All I felt was the sting, and the next thing was a solid blackout.”

When he woke up, Scott was no longer in combat. In fact, he wasn’t sure where he was.

“I didn’t even know they had put me in a body bag,” he said. “Then all of a sudden, my face just felt warm. I heard the sweetest voice you ever would hear say, ‘Have no fear and believe.’ My eyes opened, and I started breathing.”

Scott remembers a shocked medic opening the bag, laying a hand on the soldier’s shoulder and saying nothing but, “Thank God Lieutenant. Thank God.”

It was one of a few times Scott got lucky during his service, but that’s not quite how he sees it.

“I’m not a lucky soldier,” he said. “I’m a double-blessed soldier.”

Born in Clanton, Alabama, Scott joined the Alabama Army National Guard as a high school student before his unit was activated in 1948 and sent to Fort Jackson in South Carolina.

The journey would take him across the world and back from Puerto Rico and Germany to Hawaii and Japan. He held the rank of sergeant first class in 1951 when he started his tour in Korea, where he was injured twice.

The first time was during the Battle of Chosin Reservoir, where he and his comrades were forced to endure freezing conditions for days after being encircled by outnumbering Chinese troops. United Nation and U.S. forces mounted a successful, though brutal, retreat, losing 30,000 to cold and combat and earning soldiers the title, “The Frozen Chosin.”

Scott still remembers the shrill sound of the incoming artillery fire and the force of the explosion that picked him up and set him back about 30 feet. ➔



Emma McRae/Dispatch Staff

William “Bill” Scott explains the significance behind each of the pins on his American Legion cap. Scott was awarded two Purple Hearts, a Bronze Star and a Silver Star for his heroic service in Korea.



Emma McRae/Dispatch Staff

William "Bill" Scott stands beside a flag at American Legion Post No. 69 in Columbus. Scott served in the Army for 15 years, eventually earning the rank of first lieutenant.

He was hit by shrapnel and spent two weeks in a field hospital before returning to his platoon, he said.

In another stroke of blessing, Scott and a sergeant were once keeping watch. When night fell, the two soldiers were planning their dinner when they realized – much to Scott's dismay – they only had cans of corned beef hash.

"I hate that stuff," Scott said. "I just tossed it back over my head."

The can's landing coincided with a painful grunt, as Scott remembers.

"(The sergeant) rolled one way, and I rolled the other," he said. "Four (North Korean soldiers) had come up behind us. We took care of the firefight, and after that, I got on my knees and crawled up on that hill. I found that can of corned beef hash and kept it for two years (before) I lost it."

After his second injury, Scott went home to Alabama, where he met his future wife Helen. The two had a daughter, named Sonia, and were together 49 years before Helen passed away.

Wanting to be closer to his daughter and her family, Scott moved to Columbus two years ago, where he continued one of his favorite pastimes: eating at Cracker Barrel. His server at the restaurant eventually introduced him to her widowed mother-in-law, Mary McDill.

"We started going together and eating at Cracker

Barrel and playing bingo," he said. "One and a half years later, I asked her to marry me, and she finally said yes. We were married on Oct. 18 2024."

Scott said Mary introduced him to the Veterans of Foreign Wars and the American Legion posts in Columbus.

"It's a wonderful thing because we support the veterans that are living and take care of the widows of the ones that are fallen," he said. "I've gone to my first convention. I love going to them now."


After spending 15 years traveling the globe with the Army and being awarded two Purple Hearts, a Bronze Star and a Silver Star for his heroic service, Scott said he found strength in his faith.

"I don't regret a bit of it because ... it's all God's plan, not mine," he said. "I don't know how many years he's going to give me, but you know I'm in his hands because of what happened to me. If I wasn't in his hands, I wouldn't be sitting here."

Each year a ceremonial wreath is placed at the Lowndes County Courthouse in honor of veterans. Scott will place the wreath during this year's Veterans Day celebrations, an honor he said is incomparable.

"That will be the biggest honor I could ever have – remembering my military comrades."


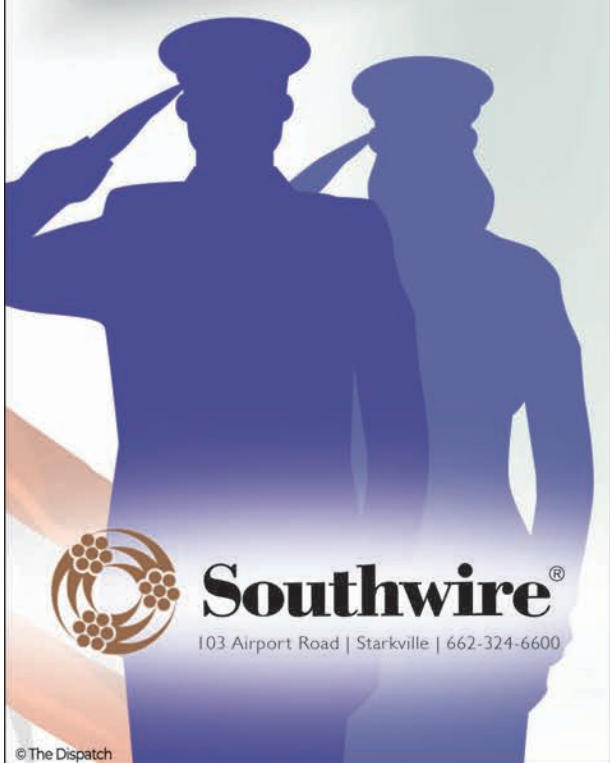
Profile by **Emma McRae** | emcrae@cdispach.com



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ROBERT BISHOP

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Army • Command Sergeant Major

Robert J. Bishop didn't have any grand aspirations when he signed up for the Army. While his path would eventually have him learn the inner workings of helicopters and spend years flying an ocean away, at the beginning he just wanted to follow in his brother's footsteps.

"My family was important," he said. "My brother was in the military. He did 25 years (and) was a Vietnam veteran. He was a big influence on me going into the military. I wanted to be an infantryman just like he was."

Bishop joined the Army in 1994, going through training at Fort Johnson in Louisiana. While he talks about his time as an infantryman without much fanfare, the groundwork for his eventual career was already being laid.

"I was in mechanized infantry, so we did a lot of maintenance in our tracked vehicles, spent a lot of time in the motor pool," he said. "We went to the field a lot of the time by helicopter. And I was just amazed by the crew chiefs, how they managed everything on that aircraft. That made me decide I wanted to do aviation on my second enlistment."

After four years training and running maintenance on ground vehicles, Bishop reenlisted and went through retraining to work on UH-1 "Huey" helicopters.

"It was amazing. I had a chance to really learn the aspects of a helicopter, the function of it, what made it fly, different components," he said. "I was really blessed to be mechanically oriented. As a crew chief, and every time that aircraft took off I was on it. Every time a pilot flew a warrant officer, I was on it to maintain it. I got a lot of experience, a lot of flight hours."

He was eventually stationed overseas in Germany, overseeing helicopters used to train European pilots. He stayed in that position until his retirement in 1998.

"I had a chance to fly all over Germany," he said. "It was a beautiful country, and it was amazing getting to fly from 8 to 12, come back and refuel, then go back out. I stayed in that aircraft about eight hours a day, doing different maneuvers and techniques to train the pilots."

After Bishop retired from service, he remained a part of the broader military system. He spent 17 years as a high school Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps instructor. Today he helps run a STEM program at Mississippi State University in partnership with the Army, teaching young people from Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana the engineering



Courtesy Photo

Robert Bishop poses for a portrait in his Army uniform. His affinity for mechanical systems would eventually be applied to maintaining helicopters, skills he today imparts to young students.

fundamentals he learned and honed during his years of service.

He still misses the people he served with, but focuses more on his current work raising the next generation.

"It was really hard, once you retire, not to have that camaraderie," he said. "That's something you really miss, the people. I still stay in touch with some of them. ... But one of the biggest things I've liked is JROTC, motivating young people to be better citizens. Every summer, all these kids come and we get to actually introduce them to engineering."

Profile by **Cullen Paradis** | cparadis@cdispatch.com



**"WHAT THEY GAVE US
IS BEYOND OUR POWERS
TO REPAY...**

**THEY GAVE UP TWO LIVES:
THE ONE THEY WERE LIVING,
AND THE ONE THEY WOULD
HAVE LIVED."**

- PRESIDENT REAGAN

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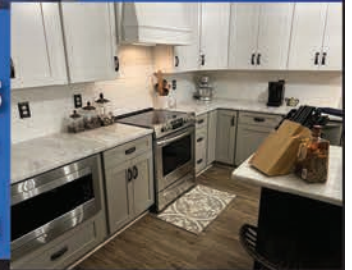
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LEONARD BROWN

THE
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Army • Sergeant

Sgt. Leonard Brown, 82, of Columbus, served with the U.S. Army during the Vietnam era for about three years. He was a technician, working on vehicles or whatever needed fixing, and was in the 101st Airborne Division-Golden Eagles.

He volunteered for the Army and left his native Artesia, going to Fort Campbell, Kentucky, in 1967 when he was about 26. Times were hard here, and he was working on a farm. His adventures were quite different from his Mississippi life, and he'd never been away from home.

"I jumped out of planes, fixed things, did whatever they needed me to do," Brown said of his service.

He earned the Bronze Star for bravery for his Vietnam service, and said the most memorable day was when the North Vietnamese overran his location. That firefight was what he was trained to do, he said, and he remembers it like yesterday, wishes he could go back today to those exciting times.

"It was the most exciting days of my life," he said.

He said he flies a flag outside his house that says, "All gave some, some gave all," and that he has visited the Vietnam memorial wall to try and find men he served with and was separated from.

"There's some I never have been able to track down. They're probably still over there," Brown said.

Brown served one tour in Vietnam and was hospitalized for months in Japan for related injuries. He said he still is under the care of a psychologist for post-traumatic-stress-related issues. Leonard retired as an E-5 sergeant.

He followed the footsteps of his father to the Army. His dad served in Germany and was there when Brown was born in 1942.

Before leaving for the Army, Leonard proposed to the former Geraldine Edward, also of Columbus, and promised to marry her upon his return. They did marry and raised a son, who now lives in Chicago, and they also have a grandson there.

After the war, he worked at International Harvester in Broadview, Illinois, and he retired from there after 15 years, eager to return home to his beloved Columbus. Back home, he worked for United Technologies until retiring from there in about 1995.

Geraldine graduated from Tougaloo College and taught at Jackson State, and started the first music



Courtesy photo


Leonard Brown, a native of Artesia, served with the U.S. Army. He earned a Bronze Star for his bravery in Vietnam.

school in Columbus, Brown said.

These days, he and Geraldine live in Columbus where he keeps an eye on local issues, though he says he's not political. He fears a greater war in the Middle East, regardless of who wins the upcoming election. He says he's ready to go help fight, but they likely won't let him.


He says he "piddles around" and takes care of his wife full time. They go to Shiloh Church.

Profile by **Pamela McRae** | *Special to The Dispatch*




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GEORGE MARTIN BRYAN

THE DISPATCH

Air Force • Second Lieutenant

Most people know the name George Bryan. They've at least heard the name or seen it.

Lt. George M. Bryan was a Starkville High School graduate and Mississippi State sophomore before he enlisted in the Air Force on June 2, 1942. He was joining the ranks of the 16 million men who served in World War II. Like many others, Bryan did not return home.



Courtesy photo

Second Lt. George Bryan stands in front of an aircraft in the 1940s. During his final mission, he was the co-pilot of the B-17F "The Bearded Lady." During his service, he was a part of the 91st Bomber Group and 322nd Bomber Squadron.

But part of his legacy continues as a staple in the Golden Triangle. He's the namesake for the area's oldest airport, George M. Bryan Field, and his military journey inspired other family members to follow in his footsteps – leaving a family name for others to carry in his honor.

His niece, Georgia Bryan Lindley, still lives in Starkville in her uncle's childhood home on Greensboro Street. Though she never met Bryan, her family's archives of articles tell the story of the man she's named after.

"I'm very honored that my parents and grandparents did that," she said. "My family, my son, daughter in law and grandson are all involved in the military and public service. That's just a way of life in my family."

Bryan was one of three brothers who wanted to serve his country in WWII.

"Both his brothers enlisted in different branches of the service," Lindley said. "That group was truly the greatest generation and very patriotic. My dad was unable to serve because of his bad knees from football playing, but his other brother served in the Navy. All three of the boys served their country."

Lindley's collection of newspaper clippings tell the legacy of Bryan, the first aviator from Oktibbeha County killed in action during WWII. She said he was determined to fly planes – receiving his civilian's pilot's license just before enlisting.

He was a second lieutenant in the US. Army Air



Courtesy photo

During WWII, Second Lt. George Bryan was killed in action at age 22 during the Schweinfurt-Regensburg Mission. He was the first aviator from Oktibbeha County killed in WWII. Bryan's family collected newspaper clippings of his sacrifice to archive and document his military journey and service.

Force, during his final mission: the Schweinfurt-Regensburg Mission. He served as the co-pilot of a B-17, nicknamed The Bearded Lady, when German enemy fighters hit and destroyed the plane's number two engine.

Just days after his 22nd birthday, Bryan was killed in action.

"He was killed in Europe and buried in the Netherlands," she said. "There were some women there who took care of his grave. My grandfather re-enlisted and went overseas to look for George's remains and found his grave and subsequently brought his body back to the United States."

When Bryan returned home, the family held a funeral in the family home on Greensboro Street and he was laid to rest in the Greenwood Cemetery in West Point.

"I never had the chance to meet him, but I know he was always determined to go into the Air Force," she said. "He did that young and he was killed young."

Profile by **Mary Pollitz** | *Special to The Dispatch*



*"One flag,
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 one hand,
 one Nation,
 evermore!"*

- Oliver Wendell Holmes

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SCOTT BURNS

Marine Corps • Lance Corporal

THE DISPATCH

Scott Burns has never been one to back down from a challenge.

That determination is what led him to serving his country by joining the United States Marine Corps.

“To be honest with you, I knew I wanted to be in the military. But when I was in high school, somebody told me I wouldn’t make it in the Marines, and so I decided to prove them wrong and join. I actually made it and did pretty good,” Burns said.

This was the start of a career for Burns. He served in the Marines from 1991 to 1995.

While in the service, his assignment was Motor Transport (Motor T), which included driving and maintaining the vehicles and equipment within them for the outfit.

Burns was stationed in Okinawa, Japan and Jacksonville, North Carolina.

However, his time with the Marines was cut short due to an injury sustained during a training exercise.

“After dealing with it for a couple years, I ended up having 22 surgeries in about 20 years and ended up having one of my legs amputated due to that injury,” Burns said.

This resulted in a medical discharge for Burns. Another challenge.

But as Burns had repeatedly proven, he doesn’t back down.

After a few years, he decided though he could no longer serve his country in the armed forces, he could still help by serving those that did.

“I knew that I couldn’t be in the military anymore, but I wanted to do something to still serve those who were serving,” Burns said. “Initially, it was a one time deal to raise money to buy calling cards to send overseas back in 2005.”

However, something clicked in him and in that moment, he saw his path before him.

“After that event, I realized that I was good at raising money. So we continued to do the event for, you know, 15 years before we decided to make it our own 501(c)(3),” Burns said. “The first 15 years, we raised money and we gave it to other veterans nonprofits. We decided that we wanted to have a little bit more control of where the money went to be able to help other people.”



Courtesy Photo

Scott Burns entered the Marines fresh out of high school. He served for four years before being medically discharged.



Courtesy Photo

Scott Burns looks over the parking lot of the Mall at Barnes Crossing in Tupelo during a fundraising event. The 7 Days for the Troops event raised \$39,500 for the organization to use to help veterans.

Thus, 7 Days for the Troops was born.

The nonprofit provides various services to veterans throughout the state, helping them overcome the obstacles before them, just like Burns did.

“We do things like (purchase) all-terrain track wheelchairs and pay utility bills,” he said. “We’ve also done two tiny homes in Mississippi. We’ve done one in Winona and one in Oxford. We’ve done Christmas for kids of veterans and some active duty military. We also helped pay some funeral expenses for a veteran who lost a child and couldn’t afford the funeral expenses.”

The organization also hosts holiday meals for veterans at Thanksgiving and Christmas. Last year, there were more than 100 veterans who attended the meals.

In addition to his nonprofit, Burns is also commandant of the Marine Corps League in Tupelo, a member of the American Legion and a member of the Combat Veterans Motorcycle Group.

Profile by **Robert Scott** | *Special to The Dispatch*



2024

VETERANS

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WOMEN IN UNIFORM,
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WILLIE BYRD

Army • Master Sergeant

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Retired Master Sgt. Willie Byrd volunteered to serve in the U.S. Army during the Vietnam conflict and then served as a communications chief at bases all over the country and world until retiring and returning home to Columbus.

From 1962 to 1985 Sgt. Byrd served, with two tours in Vietnam (1966-67 and 1971-72) and about 10 years stationed in Germany. He started out as a pole-climbing lineman, advancing to communications chief. In the 1980s he developed critical communications equipment procedures that were implemented into army operations worldwide, for which he earned a commendation and significant monetary reward.

In Vietnam, Byrd served a secondary function as a cavalry scout, going out to search for the enemy and set up ambushes. It was during one of these excursions he had a particularly memorable experience.

Byrd explained that his cavalry scout unit engaged with Viet Cong fighters during Operation Johnson City. From sunrise to about 11 a.m. the units clashed eventually resulting in more than 600 dead Viet Cong, 39 dead Americans and 105 wounded Americans.

While searching the battlefield to collect the deceased and injured, he grasped the hand of a soldier he thought was dead, but the hand squeezed back. Kneeling with the soldier, he heard his last words, "Mama? Mama?" Byrd assured the soldier she could hear him, and the soldier gave his last breath with his mother's face on his mind. He later learned the soldier was from Memphis.

"I felt like that last breath went out of him and went into me. I'll never forget it," Byrd said.

The experience was so convicting that when Byrd came home and had a flight through Memphis, he went straight to that mother's home. She was sitting on the porch. They embraced each other and cried, he recalled.

At one point, she said, "Thank you for bringing my son home." And he felt like he exhaled the spirit of that soldier and set him free into the arms of his mama.

As communications chief, Byrd and his family moved all over: Fort Sill, Oklahoma; Fort Lewis, Washington; Fort Benning, Georgia; Fort Carson, Colorado, and Fort Polk, Louisiana. But their favorite place was when they lived in Germany for 10 years, serving in Werzburg, Berlin and Furth.

In Germany, he remembers going over into East Berlin on tours where he would meet East Berlin citizens who would ask for help escaping to the West.



Courtesy Photo

Willie Byrd, a retired Army master sergeant, served two tours in Vietnam, followed by several stateside stations and a tour in Germany, during which he helped guard Nazi prisoner Rudolf Hess.

He remembers a particularly important prisoner they guarded at Spandau Prison – former Deputy Führer Rudolph Hess, a long-standing personal aide to Adolf Hitler.

Experiences like these earned him a trusted position with the Lowndes County Juvenile Detention Center, where he worked for 10 years as judge designee under Judge Beverly Franklin.

Willie and his wife since 1970, Whirllie, have four children and live in Columbus. While overseas, in addition to raising children, Whirllie worked with German manufacturer Siemens, and in administration at German air force base Templehof. Their first and last children were born in Columbus, and others in Colorado Springs and Germany.

Profile by **Pamela McRae** | *Special to The Dispatch*



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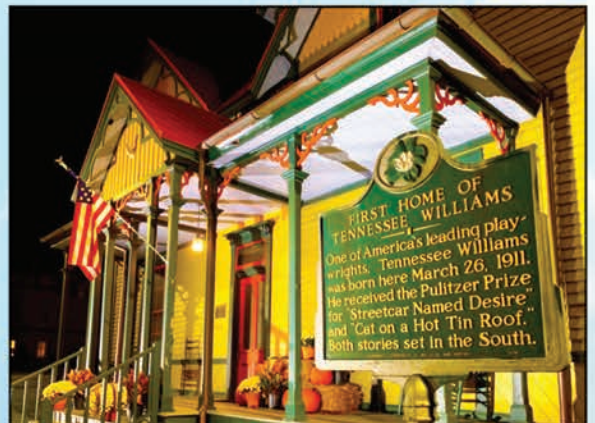


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appreciation
IS NOT TO UTTER WORDS,
BUT TO LIVE BY THEM.

- John F. Kennedy



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LUKE CARPENTER

Army • Captain

THE
DISPATCH

If there's one consistent throughline in Luke Carpenter's life, both in and out of the military, it's his concern for others. Even serving as a tank commander on one of the most hazardous supply routes in Iraq, Carpenter's memory focuses on the civilians trying to live their lives in the middle of a war.

"I always tried to balance taking care of my convoy and the Iraqis that live there," he said. "Sometimes one would go over the other, but I always really tried to make that trust my top priority. It doesn't help to go over there and create just as many people that don't trust America as there were before."

Carpenter comes from a long line of veterans, with over a dozen members of his extended family serving in the armed forces. He was scouted in high school by a recruiter and offered a place at a wide variety of military academies, eventually settling on an offer from West Point's long jump team.

While he initially looked to the military as just a fun time and a way to see the world, he began to learn early of the importance of the people around him.

"I remember one of the cadets, from New York, there was this incredibly steep hill at the end of our 10-mile march," he said. "She started falling, but the rest of us did our best to help carry her load for a bit. Later that year, I was having trouble with certain maths, and she helped me through them. We all have strengths and weaknesses. That's where we collaborate."

Carpenter was sent to Iraq right after graduating. Initially slated to be an intelligence officer, he took an unexpected offer to become a tank commander managing an M1A1 Abrams. He met his new squad just hours before its first patrol.

It was far from a peaceful assignment. Acting as a deterrent for supply convoys down one of the country's major arteries, Carpenter dealt with regular ambushes and dozens of improvised explosive devices during his year-long deployment.

Though his platoon made it through without losing anyone, others in his company had fatalities. Another tank commander made a habit of stopping under a tree during patrols and was injured by a planted explosive. Carpenter's crew took to using a random number generator to dictate their patrol maneuvers.

"We were very very lucky," he said. "We knew enough to keep our guys mostly safe, as best we could, but there's always an X factor. ... Anything I ever did well was because I had smart people with me giving me good advice."

Carpenter returned to the states in 2006, sta-



Courtesy photo

Capt. Luke Carpenter in 2005 when he was serving as a Tank Commander in Iraq. He graduated from United States Military Academy in 2004 and served in Iraq.

tioned in Kansas at Fort Riley. He retired from the military in 2009, working for an oil company and eventually as an engineer specializing in supply and manufacturing. His work has taken him from energy solutions to dental health products to AC/DC breakers powering trains.

Looking back on both his civilian and military life, what stands out to him is the impact he has on the people around him.

"We're all so interconnected. I hope every decision I made in Iraq did more help than harm, and every job I've taken since then has had a purpose," he said. "I always just want to be a part of a group making lasting change. I think about the people in Iraq a lot. I think a lot about the kids in my patrol area. ... We tried to make it a less dangerous place for them. I just hope they're happy today."



Courtesy photo

Capt. Carpenter graduated in May 2004. He also was on the track team as a long jumper.

Profile by **Cullen Paradis** | cparadis@cdispatch.com

**“A hero is
someone who
has given his
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-Joseph Campbell



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— Peter Marshall

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WILL DUPLER

Army • Sergeant

THE
DISPATCH

Will Dupler, 74, of Columbus, joined the Army from 1969-1973, during the Vietnam conflict, because he wanted a say in where and how he served. It turned out to be a fortuitous choice.

Coming from a long line of truck drivers, young Will was chosen from his training class before he even graduated to serve in transportation units in Vietnam during his two tours there, and eventually he served at the Pentagon where he transported and protected dignitaries as part of the presidential protection staff.

“I don’t want to brag, but I could do things with a limousine they had never seen before,” he recalled.

In Vietnam, he said, he drove an 18-wheeler transporting munitions to the front lines, including Cambodia. He earned the Bronze Star for bravery for his service there.

Back stateside, he served at Fort Myers, Virginia, just five minutes from the Pentagon, as transportation and bodyguard for numerous visiting dignitaries, diplomats, officers and their families. He would pick up families who came in for ceremonies where Congressional Medals of Honor were presented, and one of the most memorable assignments was picking up 5-star General Omar Bradley, the last living 5-star general ever, and his entourage.

Dupler wanted to re-enlist, but at the time, the Army was anticipating bringing 500,000 soldiers home from Vietnam and finding jobs for all of those, so they were only re-enlisting those with six or more years of service. Will retired as a sergeant E-6.

Being in the Army “made a man out of me!” Dupler recalled.

“When I went in I thought I was John Wayne, but



Courtesy Photo

A young Will Dupler in about 1969 on a truck during an operation in Vietnam’s Baylock Mountains to retrieve trailers they had left behind when the unit came under fire

after a few fights, I learned I certainly was not,” he laughed.

He said he still is in contact with a few of his Army associates.

“There’s just a few of us left, now,” he said.

After his service he worked for a trucking business in Florida, which he found boring, so he went back to school to become a master mechanic for marine engines, which led to his ownership for decades of a boat dealership in Columbus. Today, Will is retired and his son Dusty runs it.

Also after his service he met and married his wife Linda, who was from Columbus. They raised a family and built the boat dealership.

Profile by **Pamela McRae** | *Special to The Dispatch*



Courtesy Photo

For the last 20 years, retired Sgt. Will Dupler has represented the Army at the Fourth of July service at Fairview Baptist Church in Columbus. He organizes the Missing Soldiers table annually.



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JAY FISHER

Air Force • Colonel

THE DISPATCH

Growing up in Corinth, Jay Fisher dreamed of becoming a pilot.

But during his 25 year career in the Air Force, he didn't just fly. He helped to train more than 1,000 other pilots, along with other instructor pilots, impacting the next generation of aviators.

"I'm an American airman first," Fisher said. "Yes, I was a pilot and all those other things. But the first thing is, you're part of a larger organization whose mission is to do what the United States calls on you to do."

Fisher graduated from Mississippi State University and its Reserve Officer Training Corps program in 1991. The next year, he received his first commission as a personnel officer in Washington, D.C. In 1996, he returned to Mississippi to go through pilot training at CAFB.

Fisher spent five years flying the KC-10 Extender, a cargo and refueling airplane, supporting active combat zones, humanitarian relief missions and cargo missions. He flew in Operation Allied Force in the Balkans and in Operation Southern Watch in Iraq.

Often, Fisher said, his job was to help fighter planes cross the ocean. He flew over the Atlantic and Pacific countless times.

"Getting to fly across the ocean in the middle of the night when there's no moon out, and there's nothing but stars around is certainly amazing," Fisher said. "You can see hundreds of shooting stars in a single trip, because they're happening all the time and you're more aware of them."

One of the benefits of that position, Fisher said, was getting to fly all over the world, to places like Borneo, Spain, France, the United Arab Emirates and more.

Eventually, Fisher started training pilots on the KC-10 Extender, and then, the T-1. Training would include time in the classroom, simulators, watching the instructor fly, and then letting the students fly with the instructor, Fisher said.

"They really kind of take on the mold of the instructor, the techniques and the little tips," Fisher said. "The student really picks that up for themselves and it becomes a part of who they are as a pilot. So when you're a pilot instructor, not only are you correcting



Jay Fisher's official photo from his time as vice commander of the 14th Flying Training Wing at Columbus Air Force Base is pictured. In the role, he was responsible for more than 3,600 people, an operations and maintenance budget of \$147 million and capital assets and equipment exceeding \$2.3 billion, according to a biography from the Air Force.



Jay Fisher is pictured sitting behind his desk at the Lowndes County administrator's office. Fisher spent 25 years in the Air Force, training pilots and instructor pilots and eventually becoming vice commander of the 14th Flying Training Wing at Columbus Air Force Base. He became county administrator after retiring from the Air Force and working briefly as a banker.

the mistakes of the pilot, they're really becoming a little bit of you."

After a brief stint attending Air Command and Staff College at Maxwell Air Force Base in Alabama, Fisher was assigned to work as the country director for the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia under the Deputy Under Secretary of the Air Force at the Pentagon in Washington, D.C.

In 2008, Fisher moved to Randolph Air Force Base in Texas, where he worked with the 99th Flying Training Squadron. There, he trained instructor pilots on how to teach others to fly.

By 2012, Fisher was assigned to go to Afghanistan for a year, at a non-flying desk job in Kabul at the headquarters for the International Security Force, where he helped to plan America's withdrawal from Afghanistan.

"The compound got bombed the first day I was there," Fisher said.

But by 2013, he was back stateside, and by 2015, he had been assigned back to CAFB, this time as the vice commander for the 14th Flying Training Wing.

At the end of his two years as vice commander, Fisher said, the demands of the job – which involved helping to manage thousands of people – started to take their toll. In 2017, he decided to retire from the Air Force.

After retiring, Fisher took a job as a banking officer with Renasant Bank for a few years before transitioning into his current role as county administrator. The transition, he said, has allowed him to be more engaged with the community and to spend more time with his family.

Profile and photos by **Abigail Sipe Rochester** | arochester@cdispatch.com



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EDWIN HUMPHRIES

THE
DISPATCH

Army • Private First Class

There is one thing that is certain. World War II took its toll on Edwin Humphries.

Humphries, now 98, was 18 when the second “War to End All Wars” was raging in Europe. He and his brother, who was a year older, were exempt from being drafted into service as they were timber workers, which was declared an essential job in the war effort at home.

However, they didn’t feel right being at home when so many young men their age weren’t. They wanted to do their part to preserve freedom.

“My brother and I talked about it, and we decided we need to go into the Army and serve,” Humphries said. “So we did. He went in 1943, and I went in 1944. I was enlisted in June 1944. That was at Camp Shelby. After the enlistment, I was with the group that was shipped to Fort Bliss, Texas, to anti-aircraft training.”

This was the beginning of troubles for Humphries, and it gave him a small sample of what his time in the service would be like.

“We had no ear protection,” Humphries said. “The only thing we did was use some rolled up toilet paper and then tried to get through with that. When you shot those four 40-caliber machine guns, you couldn’t hear for several days. Before we finished training, a lot of us lost hearing in one ear. I lost hearing in my right ear there. Several of the guys lost all hearing, and they had to be discharged because they were not fit to be in service.”

Then came the winter. The intense outdoor training maneuvers, paired with the harsh winter conditions led to multiple members of the outfit falling ill with pneumonia. Humphries was among them.

Little did he know, however, that pneumonia, coupled with the death of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, would save his life.

“In May, they put us on a train and sent us to Fort Meade, Maryland,” Humphries said. “On the way up there, (Roosevelt) died, and they were bringing his body by train to Washington. They stopped all other trains coming in for about 2 1/2 hours. We didn’t know it, but while we were sitting there, (our) outfit flew out to Germany.”

This mission would turn out to be a deadly one.

“None of those guys came back that I could ever find out,” Humphries said, still with the bite of sadness behind the words.

The remaining members of the outfit, those stricken with pneumonia, wondered what was next for them. That question was soon answered as the theater shifted and the war in the Pacific ramped up.

“After two or three weeks, I don’t remember how

it went, they put us on a boat and sent us to the Pacific,” Humphries said. “It was over 30 days that we were on the ship. We joined the 32nd Infantry, and we invaded Luton Island. The Imperial Japanese Army was there, and we drove them out of Manila, and we were heading to Bagheel, which is way almost to the north end of the island.”

However, misfortune was soon to strike Humphries again.

After surviving combat in the jungles of the small, Pacific island, an accident during a routine task set Humphries on the path to prematurely ending his military career.

“A buddy of mine and I were unloading some boxes off of a truck, and he tripped and fell and threw me off,” Humphries said. “I just hit the ground, and I couldn’t move. I was totally paralyzed. They made a pack saddle, and picked me up and carried me into the doctor’s tent.

“He started giving me shots in my back,” he added. “That accident was on Monday, and it was Friday before I could move. So I finally got back where I was able to go around again. Then sometime around the first of August, I woke up and I was totally blind.”

This caused him to be transferred to a field hospital, where he caught hepatitis.

“Hepatitis was deadly,” Humphries said. “That was it.”

Thanks to his determination and the kindness of a nurse in the hospital (also from Mississippi), Humphries achieved the impossible. He survived and eventually regained some vision in his left eye.



Courtesy Photo

Edwin Humphries holds a photo of himself from his time in World War II. Humphries saw combat in the Pacific before being medically discharged due to a variety of injuries sustained in the service.



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THE
DISPATCH

Johnny Johnson graduated from Mississippi Industrial College with the fullest intent to become an educator.

But at 21 years old, he was drafted by the United States Army in 1969 – changing his life plans. He quickly went through basic training and was sent to Vietnam for one year.

“I (was) drafted (less than) a year before they sent me,” he said. “I was in the infantry and rode the convoys.”

After a year in Vietnam, Johnson returned to U.S. soil, finished his three years in active duty and joined the reserves.

In the reserves, Johnson took his job seriously. He spent nearly every week working to ensure he was ready for another campaign.

“I helped prepare the training in case we had to go to war,” he said. “I helped draft directives if we were ever called up.”

It wasn’t long before he was called up again.

“I trained most folks for Desert Storm, but I wound up having to go too,” he said.

Johnson worked the receiving station in Saudi Arabia where he handled incoming personnel and assigned soldiers to their units.

“It was a terrible time, very stressful,” But that was the most successful campaign I ever participated in,” Johnson said.

Johnson, who said he doesn’t like to brag, is proud-est of the time he served in Desert Storm.

“They say we had more than 600,000 men, but I was there,” he said. “We had a million folks. My colonel and I worked 16 hours a day moving soldiers out of the receiving stations. ...They really prepared to win that war.”

As a command sergeant major, Johnson prepared soldiers, boosted their morale and it also meant he stood in the room with some of the most important leaders during the war.

“The military changed my life,” he said. “I got to meet and sit down with Colin Powell and George H. W. Bush.”

He also worked with the man in charge of military operations for Desert Storm, Gen. Norman Schwarzkopf.

Of his time in the military, Johnson said he’s thankful. The military gave him friendships and camaraderie across the board. But he’s mostly thankful for how blessed he’s been since serving.

“God be with me, I have not suffered,” he said. “I’ve been lucky and I’ve not left you all yet.”

Continuing his public service, Johnson used his G.I. Bill to pay for his educator specialist’s degree.



Courtesy photo

Johnny Johnson, 22, sits on a jeep in Vietnam in 1970. Johnson was drafted in 1969 and spent one year in Vietnam in the infantry.

The Houston native followed his wife, a Mississippi University for Women graduate to Columbus where he became an educator. He became the Hunt Junior High principal and worked in the central office with Columbus Municipal School District.

“The military, it just changed my life in so many ways,” he said. “... The military gave me a personal sense of discipline which in turn helped me to be able to move forward in my career choices.”




Courtesy photo

Command Sgt. Major Johnny Johnson is pictured in his Army uniform. Johnson served one year in Vietnam and in Desert Storm. He spent more than 30 years in the Army and Army Reserves.

Profile by **Mary Pollitz** | *Special to The Dispatch*

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STARLING JONES

THE
DISPATCH

Air Force • Technical Sergeant

As a high school graduate, Starling Jones, now 79, had a choice between a potential football career at Jackson State and the Air Force, and his choice made all the difference for him and his family.

"I never would have imagined doing all the things we did, going all the places and having the experiences we did," he said of his 22 years of military service. He said his kids still talk about all the advantages they had being out in the world while he served in the USAF.

Jones was a football standout from Magee in 1966, and fortuitous contact with the Jackson State University football coach gave him the chance to attend college and let sports pay for him to follow his dream to be educated as a mechanic, like several of his friends were doing. His supportive football coaches knew he longed to excel and make the most of his future and had arranged for his outstanding skills to be noticed. Skills that got him a meeting with the coach that resulted in an offer to start making his dreams come true.

But that summer before he was scheduled to go, his cousin A.J. Johnson came home for a visit in a U.S. Air Force uniform that really impressed young Jones. He talked with his cousin about the opportunities four years in the service could give him and the promise of post-service employment boosted by military experience.

"He said, 'I know you want to make yourself better, and going to Jackson State will do that, but I want to give you another option,'" Jones recalled.

That talk was on a Friday, and on Monday morning, Starling presented himself at the recruiter and joined the Air Force.

He joined the motor pool and became an aircraft mechanic, doing maintenance on planes in bases all over the world. He re-enlisted after that first four years, and again after that. After 22 years, he retired as a technical sergeant and had given his family opportunities they would not have had.

Jones talked highly of the experiences country-wide and worldwide travel gave him and his wife. They lived with him while stationed in Germany, Hawaii, Okinawa, Paris, the Azores, the Philippines, and Thailand, as well as bases in Las Vegas, Texas, Illinois, California and Louisiana.

While in Thailand, he worked on bases that supported the war in Vietnam, he said. While in Germany, he played football and was asked by American team scouts to come back and see about playing professionally, but a terrible ankle injury put an end to his potential football playing.

In Korea, he helped teach English, working with a Korean professor he met on base.

After retiring in 1988, Jones worked as a civilian aviation mechanic at Columbus Air Force Base and retired from there after 20 years in 2008. He lost his wife, longtime Columbus teacher Shelley Jones, in 2003, after a battle with cancer.

Starling and Shelley had a baby while in Germany, two more stateside, and then fostered dozens of children in Columbus, making a positive impact on countless lives. His children, and 11 grandchildren, live in Georgia and he visits them often, as well as one of their adopted foster daughters who lives in Texas. Columbus was the perfect place for them to settle, he said; close to bigger cities, but just the right size.

Profile by **Pamela McRae** | *Special to The Dispatch*



Courtesy photo

Starling Jones was an aircraft mechanic during and after his military service, including on planes like this A-10 Warthog.



Courtesy photo

Starling Jones at an airshow at Columbus Air Force Base, where he worked as a civilian after retirement on many kinds of planes.

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All the engineers in the military are “civil” engineers, Martin explained. In actuality, Martin was an industrial engineer who worked with others to maintain, build and expand military bases and infrastructure. He and his folks make buildings, facilities, runways and forward operating bases work to support every military operation.

After graduating from Mississippi State in 1981, he joined the Air Force in 1983.

As a young second lieutenant he was first stationed at the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) in the Cheyenne Mountain Complex near Colorado Springs, Colorado.

“It was very interesting, as it’s a national command post and you’re taking care of a facility in a mountain,” Martin said.

There were many senior non-commissioned officers there who provided valuable mentoring to a young officer, he said.

He and his bride, Terri, had six months together before he was sent to Sicily in 1986 to build Comiso AFB. It was a unique opportunity to build a new base that would house nuclear missiles, as it was the heart of the Cold War years. Martin had to deal with all the details of moving nuclear weapons and securely storing them for potential deployment.

While there, his fluency in Italian came in handy when he helped negotiate with striking Italian workers and helped bring them back to work. Over the years, his positions working with many different sectors and levels of command helped him hone impressive communication skills.

After six months in Sicily, he was reunited with his wife and they were stationed at McGuire AFB in rural New Jersey, tasked with doing bare-bones maintenance on a base many believed would be closed down. It ended up being a favorite station for them, as their two children were born in New Jersey, and he had the opportunity to be acting commander of a



Courtesy photo

Les Martin briefs local base leadership, as well as Congressman Jack Kingston, at Moody Air Force Base in Valdosta, Georgia. Martin is a retired U.S. Air Force colonel who was last stationed at Columbus AFB.

unit. He found he liked having “boots on the ground” work as opposed to a desk job.

He was stationed at Minot AFB in South Dakota, serving as the 5th Civil Engineer Squadron commander when the country was attacked Sept. 11, 2001. All focus turned to the War on Terror, and he sent many of his troops to Uzbekistan, to support troops searching for Osama bin Laden and his followers hiding in the mountains of Afghanistan.

Those deployed on the classified assignments knew where they were going, but information was very limited for the families left behind in South Dakota, and Martin had to deal with loved ones who did not know the whole story. That was difficult, he said. All his personnel came home, thankfully, he confirmed.

He later deployed airmen under him to fly B-2 bombers in Iraq operations and eventually was Mission Support Group commander at Moody AFB in Valdosta, Georgia, commanding 1,600 people and seven different units.

“Leading my folks – and they were ... ‘my folks’ – all my Airmen, the enlisted workforce, officers and civilians in multiple locations to put their training to use for the country was the greatest challenge, and reward,” he said. “I was honored to serve.”

Martin retired and went to work as a civilian engineer at Tyndall AFB and then Columbus AFB, where he retired again. He now enjoys days on the Elm Lake golf course and life in Columbus with Terri.

Profile by **Pamela McRae** | *Special to The Dispatch*



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HERBERT C. MILLER, JR.

THE
DISPATCH

Army Special Forces • Private First Class

When Herbert Clyde Miller, Jr. graduated from S.D. Lee High School in 1965, and decided college wasn't for him after a try, he had a new mission in mind. Miller wanted to be a part of the United States Army Special Forces, also known as Green Berets.

"My sister did a book report on the Vietnam War and Special Forces, and I read the book," Miller said. "I said, 'Well, shoot. I might have to go with these dudes.' I don't want to make it sound that easy. I went to the Army recruiter, and he said, 'I don't know anything about special forces except they train in North Carolina.'"

The only way to join Special Forces from outside the military was to volunteer, so that's what he did.

"I'm one of the few people I know that did," Miller said. "Other people were already in the Army and didn't really go in for Special Forces."

Miller had achieved his initial mission, he made it into contention for Special Forces, however, the real challenge began – training.

First came basic training at Fort Polk, Louisiana, and TriNet at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri.

Miller exited basic training as a Private First Class combat engineer. He was essentially a demolitions expert, trained at "blowing stuff up," as he put it.

He finished with three weeks of paratrooper training at Fort Benning, Georgia.

Next came the more grueling part of training.

"I think it was about six weeks," Miller said. "I don't remember exactly. The first part of it was classroom. You learn how Special Forces did stuff, how they were formed, and stuff like that. And then the last week was like, I don't know if you're familiar with (Navy) Seals, but it's about like the Hell Week of the Seals. And it was hell, I'll tell you that."

Miller's group, which began with 39 candidates, was whittled down to about 13 by the time they reached the final stages.

"We parachuted at night with a rucksack and rifle, an M14," Miller said. "I remember eating three times that week. (I ate) a handful of goat meat that we smoked, part of a half cooked chicken and a meal of c-rations that they gave you before you had your last, what you call escape and evasion exercise."

After more training and exercises, in October 1968, Miller's goal was achieved. He became part of the 6th Special Forces Group. From there, the group had to make sure they stayed sharp and kept their skills honed.

"About one month out of three, we would go somewhere, they would give us a parachute and a rifle and rucksack, and we'd parachute in and you'd stay

for a month," Miller said. "I went down to the Everglades for a month. I went out in Utah in the desert for a month and went to Alaska, and went to Panama for a month, and we survived. That was the name of the game: survival."

Miller soon became disillusioned with the bureaucratic red tape. He joined to help with the war effort in Vietnam, however, his group was never intended to go.

"I thought I was supposed to go to Vietnam, so I volunteered to go," Miller said. "They wouldn't send me. I volunteered twice, and that was that. There weren't very many of us that went out of those classes, especially if you're a demolition man. They didn't really need a demolition man. If I was a medic or weapons, I probably would've gone."

This ultimately led to Miller leaving Special Forces in November 1970.

"Sometimes I feel a little bit cheated, but I don't know. It was something to do. And like I tell people, 'If I was 21, I'd do it again.'"

Miller did join the Mississippi National Guard Special Forces Group in Columbus for five years.

"I stayed about five years because I missed jumping," Miller said. "I think all total, I had about 70 parachute jumps."



Courtesy photo

Herbert Miller Jr. is pictured in his paratrooper gear inside an airplane. Miller performed around 70 jumps in his career.



Courtesy photo

Herbert Miller Jr. poses with a couple of snakes he killed during a training exercise in the desert. Miller was a member of the United States Army 6th Special Forces Group from 1968-1970.

Profile by **Robert Scott** | *Special to The Dispatch*



VETERANS DAY

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CLYDE MOORE

Air Force • Master Sergeant

THE
DISPATCH

Clyde Moore enlisted in the Air Force only 14 days after his 16th birthday, and he would soon become the only airman he knew of to serve three separate tours of duty in Vietnam.

“I couldn’t even start to tell you how tough things were back in those days, and I just did exactly what I did,” Moore said. “I wanted to help my family.”

Moore entered the Air Force in January 1954. The recruiters, Moore said, were worried with making quotas more than anything, so Moore, not yet 18, was taken for his word about his age.

Moore earned his General Education Degree and started his military career at Luke Air Force Base, in Glendale, Arizona. As for basic training, he said his grandmother was the key in helping him through that experience.

“First day of training, I didn’t really know what to expect, and I was nervous,” Moore said. “My grandmother was a big help because she would correspond with me daily, and you wouldn’t believe how that really helped me, especially during basic training. I was just a little young kid.”

From there, Moore worked as a postal worker at 11 different bases, in places such as Texas, Arizona, Japan, Florida, New Jersey, Guam, France and Italy, in the span of 11 years, which Moore said is uncommon.

In 1964, Moore was transferred to Pleiku Air Force Base in Vietnam, for his postal services. When he arrived, he found he was one of only three airmen on the base. He had never received combat training and was told when he arrived in Pleiku that he would be taking guard duty just like all of the lieutenant’s other men.

The lieutenant handed Moore a half-cocked weapon and said that it was ready to fire. When Moore asked how to reload, since he had never handled that weapon before, the lieutenant responded that someone would be there to help him by that time. Then Moore was left alone.

During Moore’s time at Pleiku, getting the mail was different than it was at other posts. Going to the air strip every day to pick up the mail was a challenge in itself. The place was so hostile, planes kept their engines running when they dropped the mail off.

Throughout his time as a postal worker, Moore said people quickly started to know who he was on the base.

“Believe it or not, I was the most popular individual because there was no internet or anything, and that was all everybody did all day, wait for mail,” Moore said. “So I was the most popular guy.”



Dispatch File Photo

Clyde Moore sits outside the Columbus Post Office on Main Street in March 2020. He served three tours in Vietnam with the Air Force postal service.

After Pleiku, Moore was transferred to Carswell Air Force Base in Fort Worth, Texas, in 1965. Then he promptly went on another tour of Vietnam to Tan Son NHUT, AFB, Saigon, from July 1966 until the following March, then again at Da Nang AFB in 1970. Between those trips he served back in the U.S. – in Georgia and Mississippi.

After his third tour in Vietnam, Moore transferred to Lowry Air Force Base in Denver, Colorado, where he switched from postal to finance services in 1971. In Denver, his office handled all of the finances for the entire Air Force. He retired from the Air Force in 1978, marking the end of his military career of 24 years, four months and 29 days.

Back in civilian life, Moore sold real estate for a period of time before becoming one of the top car salesmen for Honda in the U.S. After retiring from that career, he returned to Columbus.

Moore said the biggest thing the military taught him was persistence.

“Being in the military, you serve the purpose of helping the U.S., and I love the U.S.,” Moore said. “I have two flags hanging over my house. I’ve got no regrets at all.”

Profile by **Emma Hardy**

“The willingness of America’s veterans to sacrifice for our country has earned them our lasting gratitude.”

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EDWARD OAKES

Air Force • Master Sergeant

THE
DISPATCH

Edward Oakes spent 20 years with the United States Air Force.

Following in his stepfather's footsteps, he enlisted at 17 while still in high school as a deferred enlistment.

"My stepfather was one of the very first Navy Seals," he said. "I wanted to go into something more dangerous than as an engineer, but he talked me out of it. He wanted me to have skills transferable to the civilian world."

Oakes became a civil engineer for the Air Force, working largely on hazmat spills and providing environmental support. He wore many hats in his career from working in the trenches to serving as incident commander.

Oakes went into the military searching for stability and finding a strong career path forward, but his time in the service offered him a new perspective.

"The military really broadened my expectations of the world," he said. "... People can go on vacation for two weeks, and I get that that's enjoyable. But it's not like living there. You've got to live someplace for a while before you understand the people."

His military career stationed him throughout the U.S. as well as The Philippines, Korea, Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Germany.

He learned in Korea that a wares seller's first sale



Courtesy Photo

Air Force Master Sgt. Edward Oakes pictured around 1979. Oakes enlisted while still in high school as a deferred enlistment and served 20 years before retiring.



Courtesy Photo

Edward Oakes pictured at Columbus Air Force Base in the mid 1990s during a war games exercise. After retiring from the Air Force, Oakes returned to Columbus Air Force Base as a civilian industrial mechanic.

of the day is a sign of good luck and in The Philippines Hershey Kisses are extremely valuable and can be used to barter.

"You understand different cultures," he said. "But none of that is in a travel brochure."

Traveling and understanding various cultures was important, but to him, the value was the team he was surrounded by. As a civil engineer, he said everyone had their own specialty. However, there were times when you needed to fill in the gaps and learn different trades from other professionals.

"I was always learning," he said. "I didn't care if I outranked you or not, I'm learning something and you're teaching me."

That camaraderie was throughout the ranks and branches, he said. He remembered specifically working on a hazmat spill in the water on Andrews Air Force Base when a representative of the Coast Guard thanked him and let Oakes continue working the scene as the incident commander.

"I've got a chest full of ribbons and accolades," Oakes said. "But when somebody pats you on the shoulder and says you did a good job, that means a lot."

Though retired from the Air Force, Oakes still serves the military but as a civilian industrial mechanic at Columbus Air Force Base. He sees the camaraderie and teamwork prevalent among servicemen, servicewomen, and civilians every day.

"It's working with people that care about their job that makes all the difference," he said. "When we pull together, we pull through. Working with a team like that, that's nice. You become family."

Profile by **Mary Pollitz** | *Special to The Dispatch*



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JAMES BYRON REID

THE
DISPATCH

Air Force • Major

From the moment he saw an Air Force pilot maneuvering over his childhood farm in Arkansas, James Byron Reid knew he wanted to fly.

“He wanted to fly, and that was it,” his wife, Kathy Reid, said. “He didn’t care about rank. He didn’t care about anything but flying. He loved it. When he saw that pilot doing all those things, he said, ‘That’s what I want.’”

He got his chance in Columbus, studying at Columbus Air Force Base in 1955 as part of the second to last class before they raised pilot education prerequisites.

James finished his training in Greenville, though he briefly fell behind in his studies due to the death of his mother. After graduation he was immediately selected to instructor training, studying in Selma, Alabama before returning to teach in Greenville.

James would spend the bulk of his time in the Air Force teaching, amassing almost 4,000 hours of instructor time. He spent a brief stint running air traffic control in Alaska before returning to Sherman, Texas, to teach instruments for six years.

Vietnam changed everything. James was taken off of instructor duty and reassigned to fly fighters, retraining to pilot the F-4 before shipping out to Vietnam in 1969 with his entire squadron.

He wound up in Da Nang, a city in the northeast of South Vietnam. After three months of running normal combat patrols, James ran into an old friend from Greenville, Jim Ahmann. Ahmann was now an assistant deputy commander and asked James to help run an all-volunteer group doing forward air control under the callsign Stormy.

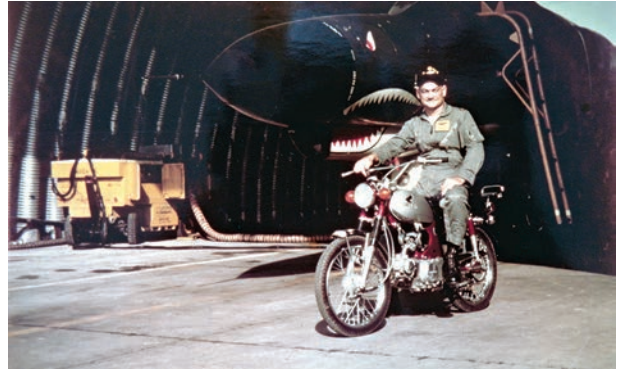
Pilots running forward air control would coordinate fire and have final approval on any local strikes. Stormy operated frequently at night and would fly low and fast to intentionally draw hostile fire so bombers at a higher altitude could pinpoint enemy locations. It was dangerous work, but James’ concern stayed with the men on the ground.

“It was rough,” Kathy said. “But he always said, ‘If we pilots can survive our mission, we’ve got a clean bed waiting on us, the officers club, a hot meal, ev-



Courtesy Photo

James Byron Reid poses for a photo before his retirement in 1974. Even after leaving the Air Force, he continued helping to train pilots in simulators for more than 20 years.



Courtesy Photo

James Byron Reid straddles a motorcycle in Da Nang, Vietnam. Reid flew forward air control missions for six months, flying low to attract anti-air fire so bombers could pinpoint enemy positions.

everything we could possibly need.’ He felt so sorry for the grunts in the jungle. It was horrible, as any war is, and his concern was for the other people.”

James was originally supposed to go to Japan after his deployment, but he opted instead for an assignment back in Columbus, where he spent his last 3 1/2 years with the Air Force as a base operations officer.

By that point the Air Force had switched to JP-4 fuel and grounded non-essential flights due to its cost. For James, the end of his days in the cockpit and his growing family sealed the deal on retirement. He left the Air Force after 20 years in 1974.

He pulled a brief stint in real estate, which Kathy characterized as “disastrous” due to high interest rates, but he couldn’t stay away from flying entirely for too long. James returned to the Air Force, helping run training simulators for more than 20 years until his death in 2001.

He was 67 at the time, dying of heart disease on Sept. 20, 2001. He had been exposed to Agent Orange in Vietnam, though his death could also be attributed to a familial predisposition to heart issues.

James flew 189 missions over Vietnam, accumulating 407 combat hours. He received a plaque for flying 50,000 combat miles at 5,000 feet or less. Kathy says his time in the Air Force stuck with him even after retiring to civilian life.

“He always said the air force was very good to him. He went to fly, and the greatest satisfaction that he got was in Stormy,” she said. “You form real bonds, and some of the same people you meet will follow you for the rest of time. Who would’ve ever thought we’d run into Jim Ahmann again in Vietnam. Yet there he was, all the way from Greenville.”

Profile by **Cullen Paradis** | cparadis@cdispatch.com



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LARRY J. SWARTZ

Army National Guard, Army Reserve • Colonel

THE
DISPATCH

Back in 1971, Larry Swartz was a newlywed, and the conflict in Vietnam “was hot.”

So, when Swartz got the opportunity to join the Army National Guard, he took it.

“I did not get into the Guard to keep from going to Vietnam, but since we (he and his wife Debbie) had just gotten married, I thought that might defer it a little bit,” Swartz said.

Swartz stayed in the service for the next 34 years, retiring in July 2005 as a colonel in the Army Reserve.

“The longer I stayed in, it got to be routine,” he said. “I got used to the drill time and the two-week annual training. Six years was up before I knew it. ... I kept going, re-enlisting.”

Enlisting as a private, Swartz grabbed notice from the non-commissioned officers over him, who recommended he enter Officer Candidate School. He completed the 14-month program to become a second lieutenant. By 1983, he joined the Reserve as a major and was stationed with the 1181st Transportation Terminal in Meridian as a prestow officer planning shiploads for military cargo.

“I’d take maybe 1,200 pieces of military cargo and fit it into the compartments of the ship,” he said, noting the need for precise computations to make sure cargo was loaded at maximum efficiency.

This matched well with his civilian career, where he worked as terminal manager for Miller Transporters in Artesia then later in the traffic department for Bryan Foods in West Point.

His logistical talents were put to the test in 1990 and 1991 in support of Operation Desert Storm, during which his unit handled almost 200 shiploads of cargo. The unit first deployed to Jacksonville, Florida, where it loaded combat and combat support equipment for the 24th Infantry Division and 101st Airborne Division. That included Jeeps, tanks, trucks, helicopters and lumber, among other things.

The unit used “every ship we could find,” including some Marine Corps ships, and needed manpower from several military units, government and civilian contractors.

“Everything was a 24-hour operation for at least the first six months,” Swartz said. “That drained the supply of longshoremen and stevedore companies during that period of time. ... We took over the whole port of Jacksonville, Florida. That was a major undertaking.

“Our job was to get the beans and the bullets to the fighting forces on the ground, and we had to do it in a timely manner (because) ... we had the combat and the combat support units waiting on the equipment to get there,” he added.



Courtesy Photo

Col. Larry Swartz worked in logistics during his career with the Mississippi Army National Guard, including supporting Desert Storm and Operation Iraqi Freedom.

After Jacksonville, his unit went to the Port of Antwerp, Belgium, to load supplies headed to Saudi Arabia to support troops on the ground. Once the fighting ended, his unit went back to Jacksonville, where it accepted retrograde cargo returning from the operation.

After the war, Swartz served stints at Camp Shelby and New Orleans – where he was promoted to colonel – before becoming chief of the Plans and Programs Division for the 3rd Transportation Command Element in Anniston, Alabama, in December 2002. There, he spent 10 months with a unit responsible for monitoring the movement of all military equipment and troops in the Iraqi and Kuwaiti theater of operations during Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom.

In March 2005, month before retiring from the service, he spent three weeks in Seoul, South Korea, as the officer in charge of a unit helping the Republic of Korea Army plan contingencies for if North Korea invaded. Again, his role centered on getting supplies to the fighting forces on the line.

“I enjoyed what I was doing because it did kind of give me a break from the civilian way of life,” Swartz said of his service. “It gave me an opportunity to do new and different things. ... Serving my country like that was about the best way I knew of.”

Profile by **Zack Plair** | zplair@cdispatch.com



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