

VETERANS DAY 2013



On Veterans Day we honor veterans, celebrate the sacrifice being made by our current service members, and encourage our future service members to continue to protect our freedoms. Our nation's military provides protection and fights for freedom. They have served us honorably in the past and continue to do so to this day. Clay County has a long history of serving its country in all branches of the military. We honor our veterans in a multitude of fashions including the rededication of Worthey Street, the displays within the Flora Train Depot, and the memorial presentation in Library Park.

Enclosed you'll find the stories of past and present service members. Whether they have served in times of war or peace, they have served admirably and with pride. They deserve recognition for all the hard work they have put into maintaining our nation's freedom. These veterans and servicemembers represent Clay County all over the world, and their stories inspire the younger generations to follow in their footsteps.

Josh Kemmerer: Unites States Army

By Nachele Workman

Josh Kemmerer, a Louisville native, specialized as a military police officer in the United States Army. At one time he was a gunner, a driver, and a team leader.

Basic training was a crazy time for Josh. He reminisced how it flew by. During that time, he learned how hard he could push himself.

This hero first trained in law enforcement at Fort Leonard Wood, where he didn't get out and explore much. It wasn't until afterwards at Fort Riley that he made tons of friends and had a lot of fun.

Starting out, he began his service in Fort Riley, Kansas; he then deployed to Afghanistan and Yongsan, South Korea, and was stationed at

Fort Campbell, Kentucky.

Josh joined the military so he could have a better chance to do something more with his life. In the process of



building his future, Kemmerer experienced many memorable moments.

About his most memorable moment, he said, "I have many memories, a lot I can't talk about, but one that has always tickled me was a time when I was taught how to repel down a 50-foot tower that

we had to climb!"

Since his return, he appreciates how easy it is to get everyday things like soda, shampoo, and toothpaste, and even movies. In Korea it was easier to get things, but not so much American items, and he missed his truck.

He explains, "Man, its nice to be able to drive myself around."

Access to basic necessities wasn't the only difference between life as a serviceman and life as a civilian. People

in towns near the army post were nice, but when he returned home from Afghanistan in uniform, many people wouldn't say anything to him, just give him dirty looks. Very few treated him well and thanked him. He doesn't know why he was treated so poorly, but he didn't let it bother him.



Jerry Stringer: Unites States Army

By Marissa Wagley

Many of you know Jerry Stringer as your former Flora High School teacher and tennis coach. But what you may not know is in 1968, as a Benton native, he performed the brave act of joining the military. During his time of service, he chose to serve our country in the army as a combat engineer.

Before beginning his job, Stringer had to go through basic training. During this time, he received many different types of training including rifle marksmanship, hand-to-hand combat, map reading, and discipline.

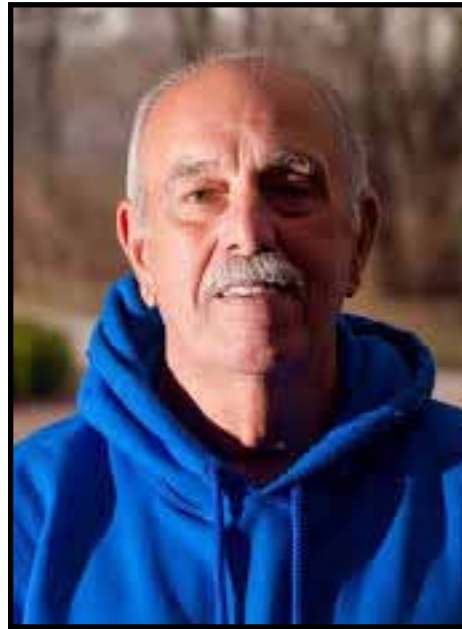
“Basic training was an eye-opening experience,” he states. He went on to explain that it was a good type of eye-opening experience for him, but shocking, nonetheless.

After training, he went on to Advanced Individual Training in Fort Sill, Oklahoma. He then advanced to an officer candidate school in Fort Belvoir, Virginia before going on to the army.

“OCS was probably the hardest thing I’ve ever done in my life. I endured constant harassment [from the trainers]

for six months straight.”

He then entered the army corps of engineers and says, “I was going to be drafted so I decided to join and get to choose what I wanted to do.”



Holding the position as officer in charge of construction, Stringer built roads, bridges, and did demolition. He was ranked as first lieutenant and began at a rifle range in Fort



Leonard Wood, Missouri for a year. While he was there, his wife, Nancy Stringer, taught school on base and thoroughly enjoyed it.

“When I left and returned from the service, my community treated me very positively,” he explains. During this time, there was turmoil and protesting about the Vietnam War. Stringer was lucky that he had a supporting family and community that agreed with his decision to join the army.

After returning home from the military, Stringer says, “I appreciated the freedom to dress as I pleased and having no restrictions.”

“I want kids to know that the only way to understand what the army is like is to experience it for themselves,” he claims. “It’s a good growing up process and a good way to get college paid for.”

He believes going into the service made him mature and learn quite a bit. He ended by saying, “If you have any doubts in your mind, don’t waste a minute, look at joining the service.”

Bryan Wyrich: United States Army 1997 - 2006

By Courtney Petty

Growing up in Conneaut, Ohio, Bryan Wyrich moved to Flora when he was in 8th grade. It was a drastic change as he had moved from a town with a school population larger than that of the entire town of Flora.

Inspired by his grandfather who “stormed the beaches of Normandy in WWII,” Wyrich followed in his Air Force father’s footsteps by joining the military while still in high school. Wyrich states that “it had always been a dream of mine to serve my country.”

He joined the United States Army in 1997 and went to basic training between his junior and senior years of high school. According to Wyrich, basic training was tough; he states “as soon as we got there the training began. It is very physically and mentally demanding. In basic you are taught a ton. We learned to shoot the M-16 rifle, hand-to-hand combat, first aid, repelling and had to spend time in the gas chamber, plus a ton of PT (physical training).”

During his 10 years of service, he achieved the rank of Staff Sergeant.

After basic, Wyrich’s MOS (military job) was 13 Echo, which is a Fire Direction Specialist, in a field artillery unit. He also has an 11 Bravo Infantry MOS.

From 2004 to 2006 Wyrich served in Operation Iraqi Freedom. His base was a tiny outpost in Baghdad, located in an area known as “The Triangle of Death,” that served solely as a place to rest



from his daily missions. Eventually a chow hall was set up by civilian contractors, Wyrich remembers,

“That was a blessing. It was nice to be able to eat a hot meal every day.”

His first order was searching for weapons of mass destruction, which he did for around 4 months. He later provided security for unarmed convoys with gun trucks armed with 50 caliber ma-

chine guns. His last mission was the training of the newly formed Iraqi Police force.

He says, “I took a lot of pride in that mission. We enjoyed working along side the Iraqis every day. We taught them everything from how to shoot an AK47 to administering an IV.”

Wyrich’s most memorable experience was serving in Iraq as the country was drafting its first constitution and being there while they held their first democratic elections, ridding themselves of their dictatorship past. He adds that he is “proud to have been there providing security during both those events.”

Proud of his service, Wyrich feels that the greatest reward is the pride felt when saying he is a soldier and served in Iraq. Serving also provided him with the opportunity to attend college. As a thanks for his service, he received the Montgomery GI Bill and was able to go to SIU to graduate with his bachelor’s degree in 2007.

Wyrich knows that the military is tough and feels that younger generations should be aware of that.

He states, “You never

know what is going to happen day-to-day. September 11th, 2001 proved that to us all. I was in the military then and knew at that moment we were at war.”

He also points out that the struggle doesn't end once the tour is over. Many soldiers return home to cope with both the physical and mental effects of their service.

He adds, “Lost limbs are very obvious to spot, but a soldier that has PTSD is not.”

Knowing this, he volunteers his limited free time to aiding fellow soldiers in coping with their PTSD; he also stays connected with all of his veteran's groups.

Fighting in Iraq, he knows that many people feel the war was unjustified. He disagrees, pointing out that Saddam Hussein was a “very evil man.”

He shares, “I met many, many people in Iraq that were tortured, had family members killed all just for speaking out against him. Imagine being tortured because you put something on Facebook that the president didn't like. I am happy to have fought in Iraq and am proud to be part of the military that removed such an evil person from power.”

Wyrich explains how life in Iraq differs from that of the United States, stating that “aside from the threat of IED's (improvised explosive device) and violence in the people's lives every day, there are none of the basic necessities we take for granted every day. There is no garbage collection, no running water, no sewage in most places.”

He goes on to explain that all of the farm work was done by hand with the whole family helping out. He adds, “the women of the country have very few rights. They are forbidden from driving, or talking to any man that is not a blood relative. Many woman



are covered from head to toe by a burka. The only opening is for their eyes.”

Wyrich's return home wasn't easy; the VA hadn't created any real reintegration programs at the end of his tour; they were “sent home to

deal with all of our problems by ourselves.” Since then, programs such as the Yellow Ribbon Reintegration program have been created to help the soldiers and their families readjust to life.

The city of Flora gave Wyrich a warm welcome home in February of 2006, Wyrich explains, “As we entered city limits I was amazed to see a police and fire truck escort into town. All of main street was lined with people on a freezing cold night to welcome me home. We went through town and then went to the VFW where they had a huge meal waiting for us. Everyone from town came up, many I didn't know, just to say thank you or give me a hug or a handshake. It was a great feeling to know that the community rallies around their troops.”

After his return, Wyrich was able to appreciate driving without the constant risk of a roadside bomb. He adds that he had missed being able to eat anything, not just MRE's (ready to eat meals).

Wyrich also appeared in an HBO documentary titled Baghdad ER when his comrade was injured after they were hit by an IED. He warns potential viewers that the video is graphic; it was filmed in a military hospital.

Howard Hartman: United States Marines 1980-1984

By Keah Tanner

Howard Hartman served in the United States Marine Corps from 1980-1984. He was originally from Windsor, Illinois but he moved to Flora, where he married Cathy Tanner.

Hartman joined the military to serve his country as his father and grandfather did.

He says, "The greatest reward from joining the military was that I got to travel all over the country."

Those rewards came with a price, however. Hartman says, "Basic training was long and hard."

In addition to travel experiences, Hartman received different types of training: Air Conditioning Mechanic, Preventive Maintenance Tech-

nology, Rifleman, Electrician Technology, and Driver.

Hartman was stationed at many different bases all across the country.

He says, "Each [base] was different, but a lot alike



because of the way we were trained." Everyone was basically the same in that they treated the members in the service very well.

There were some differ-

ences, however, including the weather and the way the local people communicated.

Hartman recalls his most memorable moment from service as his first plane ride. It took place when he flew out of St. Louis for basic training in San Diego. He was very excited to fly; the feeling when he got on and as it started moving was a thrill, he reports. Then, looking down from 30,000 feet was a trip, he reports.

When Hartman returned home from the service, his community respected and honored him. In addition to the warm welcome he received, he appreciated his mom's cooking. He was very glad to be home and to be around family and friends.



Seth Harrison: United States Army 2012 - present

By Haylee Jennings

When you think of Veterans Day, what do you imagine? Do you imagine young men and women giving their lives to preserve our freedoms years ago or do you see our enlisted soldiers that serve today? Many former Clay County residents currently serve our country around the world. Seth Harrison, an FHS 2012 graduate and Private first class in the United States Army, grew up in Rinard, IL.

Having served the Army for a year and two months, Harrison is finished with all of his training. He works as a UH-60 Blackhawk mechanic with the first cavalry division.

Some of the benefits of becoming a United States soldier are getting college paid for, comprehensive health care, generous vacation time, and family services and support groups for those in need. Harrison joined the army to be able to provide for his future family and better himself as a person and as an American.

Harrison says that basic training was the most fun adventure he had when going through his military service because he was allowed to go to the shooting range most of

the time. Harrison received physical training, advanced



rifleman ship, and drill and ceremony training.

Harrison has had many unforgettable moments in his time of service, but he said, "My most memorable moment



was when I was at a bastone range--a machine gun/grenade launcher/rocket launcher

range--in Fort Jackson, South Carolina with a belt of 100 7.62 millimeter rounds over my shoulder, waiting in line to fire my 240B."

Harrison is proud of his decision to serve his country, but he doesn't think it's for everyone. He said, "I want my generation to know that no one should rush into joining to military. You should be ready mentally and physically before you go to serve your country."

As a child, Harrison was brought up to be family oriented.

However, when he left for the Army he couldn't see his family as much, so upon his return, he said, "I appreciated my family the most whenever I returned home, and all the support they gave me throughout my training and military experience."

Harrison was stationed in Fort Jackson, South Carolina for 10 weeks while in basic training. He described Fort Jackson as "hot, humid, and there's sand everywhere." He has also been in Fort Eustis, Virginia for 17 weeks, where he completed his Advanced Individual Training (AIT). He commented that "it is REALLY cold there." Harrison is currently in Fort Hood, Texas.

Jack Thatcher: United States Air Force

By Blake McWilliams

From Germany to France to Spain to England and back again, local Veteran Jack Thatcher has traveled the world fighting for our freedom. Born in Mt Vernon, Illinois and moving to Flora at the age of three, Thatcher has always been a southern Illinois native.

After graduating from Flora High School Thatcher attended Southern Illinois University through an Air Force ROTC program. "After my four years of college the Air Force gave me the choice of five years of flight training or a desk job for three years. I chose the desk job."

"My first assignment was on Hahn Air Force base in Germany." Thatcher recalled.

Thatcher served as part of the 38th tactile missile

wing, presiding as the wing information officer. Shortly after, Thatcher was sent to Sembach Air Force base also In Germany where he was in



charge once more.

A few short years later, Thatcher came back to the states where he was the squadron commander for 140 men in Brunswick, Maine. Five years later he was promoted to captain. Honored, Thatcher filed for the unactive reserves.

Through these assignments, Thatcher gained years of experience in leadership which he used in later life.

"The exposure to leadership opportunities gave me good background experience for later life when I was a high school principal, owner and publisher of a daily newspaper, even when I served two terms in politics, one as mayor of the city. So I guess you can say it prepared me for a lot of things I encountered," stated Thatcher.

About his most memorable moments Thatcher said, "I miss my brothers in arms. We did everything together, even sports. I lost touch with everyone but through the internet in 2002 we found each other again. Now every 18 months the 12 pilots and I hold a reunion."



Johnathen Howe: US Air Force 2012 - present

By Hannah Bute

On March 13, 2012, Johnathen Ray Howe swore in to active duty for the United States Air Force. As a Rinard native, his family and small community supported him fully in his decision to join the military and throughout training.

Stationed at Shaw Air Force Base in Sumter, South Carolina, Howe is an Airman First Class as Water and Fuel Systems Maintenance. He handles the upkeep and repairs of liquid fuel storage and dispensing systems.

Basic training was a different kind of experience for all of the Airman in his class. "You get up every morning for physical training for an hour, and then you march and sit in classes all day, and then you march some more," Howe said. "It was a mental struggle more than anything, with everybody yelling at you."

In basic, Howe was taught how to shoot an M-16, and they went through a tear gas chamber as part of their training. He also learned hand-to-hand combat and how to march; they spent a lot of time marching.

"One time they came in at two o'clock in the morning and flipped me out of my bed," he explained, recalling the differences of life at home and in the military. "They were also really strict about how



you folded your clothes. If it wasn't done right or it had a piece of hair or anything on it, you got a demerit." A demerit is a negative mark upon an inspection.

Despite the training and strict ways of basic, Howe said that he felt "a sense of pride" in himself that he didn't really feel before. Statistically, only about one percent of United States citizens join the

military. "I'm part of that one percent!" he exclaimed. "Not everybody can say that."

This sense of pride was inspired by his grandfather, an Army veteran, two of his uncles and two of his cousins, the four of whom served in the Air Force.

Though military life is difficult, it is rewarding, even in small ways and unforeseen circumstances. For instance, Howe said, "The best part about joining the military is meeting new people and seeing new places. I've met three people who are now life-long friends."

Veteran's Day is when Americans from all walks of life, military and civilian, can honor the veterans who bravely

served in the military in times of war and peace. It is a day for current service members to show their appreciation for the service members who came before them.

"I enjoy thanking veterans and letting them know I appreciate what they did," Howe said. "I didn't think much of it as a kid, but I realize now how much it means to me and my family."

Kyle Dulaney: United States Marines 2000 - present

By Alyssa Moats

A 1997 FHS graduate, Kyle Dulaney is a Marine who has dedicated 13 years to the Marines and still has seven years to continue. Dulaney's job in the Marines is the Staff Non-Commissioned Officer in charge of the Avionics division.

He said, "I lead 50 Marines in the everyday life inside the unit."

He chose the Corps since it was the hardest service to be in and he didn't want to continue schooling for 13 years.

Stationed in San Diego, CA and Quantico, VA, Dulaney has been serving since 2000. He has been deployed to Iraq four times, in 2003, 2004, 2005, and 2006. Because of this, he has "seen a lot of the world that other people pay thousands to see, and all [he] had to do is serve [his] country."

In addition to seeing the world, Dulaney has enjoyed various unique experiences.

He was part of the world's largest helicopter raid in history, which took place as part of



the effort to save Private Jessica Lynch. Jessica Lynch was a supply clerk from Palestine. She was 19 years old when taken hostage in Iraq after an accident as she was trying to escape Iraqi firing.

He said, "Once I was back from my last deployment in Iraq, I moved to Quantico, VA where I was attached to the Presidential Helicopter Squadron."

As a part of that squad, he flew everywhere the President went, carrying his staff

and secret service members.

Dulaney spent five years in Virginia, then moved back to San Diego, CA in 2011. Shortly after that he was deployed to Afghanistan from 2012 to 2013.

According to Dulaney, "that was the hardest deployment I had to do because it was the first time I had to deploy from my wife and children."

He will be deploying again next year.

He said "the Marine Corps has been very good to me and my family and is definitely worth the hardship I have endured in the past." Dulaney attended Lincoln Trail College and Olney Central College, studying Landscape Architecture before joining the military.

He plans to get a degree in sports and recreation management while in the Marines. Dulaney plans on retiring "in under seven years" after which he will take time off to reflect on his time in the Corps.

Robert Taylor: United States Army

By Roy Stewart

Grandfather of FHS students Morgan and Trevor Gindlesberger and FHJHS student Abigail Gindlesberger and Athens, Georgia native Robert O. Taylor was drafted into Vietnam in 1967.

He was there for 12 months and 2 days. While there he served as a finance clerk. His headquarters was in Qui Qhon.

Taylor followed family footsteps into the military. His father was in WWII.

Serving one's country comes with sacrifices. Taylor missed out on important events in his life while in the military. Taylor's daughter, Darla, was born while he was in service.

Serving during Kennedy's presidency, Taylor vividly re-

members JFK's assassination. Taylor was very fortunate, as he did not have to fight in the

war.

"I was also very lucky in the way people treated me once I returned home," Taylor remembers. He went on to say how badly other soldiers were treated as they came home after the war.

Some may remember this American hero as "Mr. Taylor," as he is a former 7th and 8th grade teacher at Xenia school. He has maintained his Clay County residence

and currently lives on Old Route 50.

Taylor is currently involved with the VFW for parades and any veteran gatherings.

He is now very interactive with his grandchildren and spends Sundays at lunch with his family.



Blake McWilliams: Air Force

By Becca Persinger

Most Flora High School students are wondering what they will do after high school, and a large percent of them still remain undecided at the end of May, but senior Blake McWilliams has already composed his future to be an exciting one full of flying, foreign lands, and fighting for his country in the United States Air Force.

McWilliams is the FHS student body president, and participated in an array of clubs and other activities. Just by holding a conversation with McWilliams, one can tell he has excellent leadership qualities, and he will fit in well with his fellow soldiers in the Air Force.

"I've always had a love of flying," said McWilliams, "Though I have only traveled by airplane a handful of

times."

McWilliams is looking forward to serving his country in the Air Force for 20 years, and then hopes to settle down



in the beautiful state of Alaska.

"Alaska is an absolutely gorgeous state," said McWilliams, "I will also be able to spend my retirement in peace and quiet."

After McWilliams makes the transition into the

military, he wants to attend college at either the University of Illinois or at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale.

At U of I, McWilliams would major in Aerospace Engineering, but he wishes to become a center for SIUC's football team. At SIUC, McWilliams would major in a sort of mathematical degree, and minor in Aerospace Engineering.

The military would also pay McWilliams' tuition to pilot school.

"I would like to earn my Bachelor's in Aerospace Engineering, and use math as a fallback," said McWilliams.

In pilot school, McWilliams would study anything from the design of small aircrafts to nuclear missiles. He would also get hands-on learning of what it means to be a pilot.

Please remember to thank
veterans and service members!

Booklet produced and provided by Flora High School Publications Class
Sponsor: Mrs. Lisa Hemrich
Editor: Hannah Bute