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Paper 'n Ink: Taps wafting all too often

by Lynn Brisendine

So many served and now they are reaching the end of their lives. Thousands a day are dying and we may never see their like again.

Of course I am referring to the United States Service Veterans of World War II.

I grew up being mentored by one of them. I entered my adult life seeing so many others offer me counsel, expecting more of me at times than I thought reasonable. These men had been placed in situations that I would never experience and they survived man's toughest ordeal.

Most of them would not boast of the battles they fought.

The older and more stooped they became, their bodies lost agility but for many their minds clicked along. Looking at them 40, 50 and now more than 60 years later, it can be hard to imagine them as warriors, but they were and they met the enemy in some brutal places. Names many younger people today aren't all that familiar with, Guadalcanal, Anzio, the Rapido River, Normandy, Bastogne, Peleliu, Okinawa, Iwo Jima and the names continue of exotic and deadly places where the lucky survived the horror.

Then came other names of such foreign places on the Korean Peninsula where troops boiled in the summer and froze in the winter with names like Battle Mountain, Hamburger Hill, Heartbreak Ridge and too many others which occurred in the undeclared, and many call the 'Forgotten War,' of the early 1950s.

Of course our troops then took on a completely different set of names, places where battles raged in Vietnam.

This column may seem to be a few weeks too early. We will, or should, commemorate these old soldiers' deeds on Veterans Day in November. I will probably remind readers of this column to do just that on or before 11/11/12.

But I found myself recalling some brave deeds of men I have personally known again last week when I read an obituary in the New York Times.

I remember stories my Dad told, one of crossing a clear mountain river one morning hearing the guns rattle and artillery boom, spending the day in that Italian valley and recrossing the Rapido River later that same day as a waterway running red with blood.

I recalled one evening hearing the story of an American soldier captured by the Japanese. He recalled the ordeal of being a prisoner of war. His slow drawl explained horrors I couldn't begin to imagine of men so brutally treated.

A few years later I was influenced by another old soldier. He was a misplaced Bostonian. He came to the Panhandle of Texas to be a guard at a prisoner of war facility far from the action of war. One evening he recalled his day of battle. He was in France, he and 120 or so guys who grew up on two city blocks in Boston as lifelong friends. The battle raged all day and he along with two of his friends, the only three who survived that day, were removed from the front. He and the other two were immediately shipped home and given state-side duties. They had done their share. Twenty five years later he told me that story with tears falling. The recurring hurt was so apparent. He remained in Texas far away from his old neighborhood haunts filled with too many memories.

Another, one of my mentors in every sense, would, at times, tell of his ordeal of being critically wounded, captured and surviving a German Stalag Camp. His stories were dramatic, heroic and told of a time and a place filled with death, life and an indomitable will.

I later met another strong man who had four purple hearts and heard his story of a month on Okinawa where he fought all day and through the night to repel Japanese soldiers on suicide missions. In a three horrible day period, he saw the sunrise with a foxhole mate dead by his side. Four decades later I wrote of his month in the jungle. The next week at a meeting, someone said, "so you were a Marine, uh?" "No, Sir," he shot back, "I'm an Army man." He could have answered, "No, Sir, I'm an Army hero." But he didn't, because that wasn't in his makeup.

I am not even sure why the NY Times picture with the death notice caught my attention, but it did. And I read with fascination of the life of a man I knew only through a movie character in a film I thought to be made up to add to the drama.

The movie was based on a book titled, *We Were Soldiers... and We Were Young*. It dealt with one of the first Cavalry battles in Vietnam. The soldiers rode helicopters into, and finally out of, the battle. It was a fight in a jungle surrounding a large hill honeycombed with tunnels that allowed the Viet Cong to enter and leave the area in mass to attack the GIs who were basically in the open. The battle was fierce. The Sgt. Major stood his ground. He was gruff, tough and now I know was a real person.

But back to the obituary and the soldier it remembered. He was Sgt. Maj. Basil L. Plumley. And he was a true United States warrior.

This soldier participated in many of the battles named above. Sgt. Plumley wore a rare honor of a Combat Infantryman's Badge with two stars signifying that he had fought in three wars. Only 325 soldiers have ever received what is known as the "Triple C.I.B." He made five combat jumps, so he also wore a set of Airborne wings with a gold star. He accumulated 30 citations including the Silver Star.

I take so much for granted. My freedoms have come easy, at least for me. Then, I think of the men above and know that the life I enjoy, the freedoms I cherish, the flag I salute... all continue due to these and so many other valiant men who served so well.

Stories are remembered of real heroes as we hear the lonely sound of Taps wafting away all too often of late.

Making a Difference

By Gina Kelly Ellis

Do you ever watch any HGTV? Next to ESPN, that is my favorite channel. I love watching how they change the looks of houses. I like to get ideas about things I might want to do. So many times they take what is old and transform it into something brand new. Sound familiar?

In 2 Corinthians 5:17, Paul writes, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old is gone and the new has come!" Watching those home transformations on HGTV is a pretty good picture of what God wants to do in our lives. He wants to take the old us and make us into a brand new creation. He looks at our lives and sees what needs removed and sees what can stay to make us into a new home for Jesus. It is not always an easy process. As you watch these renovation shows, you will see people come in with pick axes and crow bars and hammers. They have their faces covered with masks.

They will tape off the rest of the house. They are getting ready to remove what has kept the house from being perfectly usable. This part is a tough process. Lots of heavy lifting and sweating. In the same way, there are things in our lives that we have to work pretty hard to remove. Sometimes we have bad habits that are just so hard to kick. I have never smoked, but I know smokers really struggle to quit. They are so proud when they have finally put down their last pack. Having Christ come in and renovate our life is no different. Even though He is with us, we still must make the choice every day to put down what is keeping us from having a clean new life in Him. Crowbars and hammers have nothing on those strong desires that we have for things that should not be in our lives. It is so wonderful to know that He is right there beside us urging us on and giving us the strength we need to leave that old life behind.

Then there is the next part. This is the part where fresh finishes are applied. New

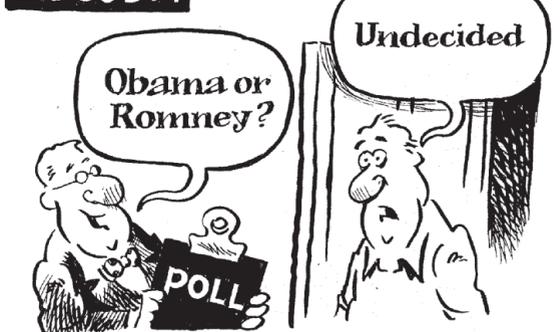
wall coverings and paints. New fixtures and lights. In our lives, this is the part where God has taken the old out and is replacing it with the new. As David says, "Create in me a clean heart." When we get those old desires and sins out of our lives, God is ready with something brand new! New desires, like the desire to spend time with Him. The desire to look out for the needs of others. That desire to serve Him in every way we can. And I will tell you, when you get this bright and shiny new life in Him, it will show to others.

The last part is the maintenance. On HGTV, they don't follow up to see how the homeowners have maintained the changes. But in our lives, people are watching to see if the change sticks. More importantly God is watching. But He watches with love and guidance. He wants this change in your life to always look shiny and fresh. To keep it, you must spend time with Him and in His Word. Forget HGTV! It's time to let God bring His crew into your life! It will make a difference.

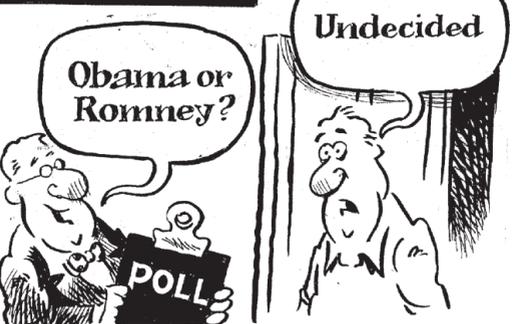
JULY:



AUGUST:



SEPTEMBER:



OCTOBER:



Yellow Footballs an Experiment

Texas Journalist...by Willis Webb

Okay, I admit it up front. I'm still sore 58 years later. Now, here's the story.

In the fall of 1954 (my senior year in high school), my hometown of Teague moved up a classification for University Interscholastic League competition. The Lions moved into Class AA from Class A in an era when Class 4A had the largest schools and Class B the smallest.

Teague, with 10 students over the minimum, moved from Class A into a AA district whose other members were four much larger schools. To underscore some broad disparity, after two years in that district, Teague returned to A and two district teams moved up to 3A.

That was also the (ONLY) season in which UIL allowed experimentation with yellow footballs. Supposedly, the compelling reason for such an experiment was that yellow would be easier to see in the poorly lit stadiums of that time and since almost all high school football was played on Friday night, the change was

expected to be beneficial to all. Beware of such declarations.

Additionally, the experimentation was the option of home teams in any game, but had to have the approval of the visiting school as well. It was also required that a list of officials (referees) for the game be approved by visiting teams' coaches.

Teague's coach, one Ed Hepler, checked out the yellow footballs and determined (1) they were a fraction of an inch smaller than the brown pigskins in use for many years, and (2) the yellow balls were somewhat slicker, thus harder to hang onto. Hepler opted to use the traditional brown at Lion home games. Supposedly, if anything other than the brown balls were used, the visiting team had the option of refusing to use them.

The Lions opened district play on the road to find nothing but yellow game balls available. Of course, our host team had "Firm Grip," a wax substance that enabled better handling of the ball. Plus, the set of officials

were entirely different than the ones approved by Hepler for the game. Just prior to the kickoff was the first and only time I ever heard him curse.

Now, before we go any further, the disparities I'm describing were the work of the other team's head coach and, determined at a later time, to be unknown to the rest of that school's officials.

The game was a defensive battle. Teague's opponent managed a TD and extra point on long pass, with the Lions blowing the coverage on a running back slipping out of the backfield to make the scoring catch. Finally, Teague mounted a late scoring drive, most of it by a big (by that day's standards) 200-pound running back.

Teague established a first and goal from the opponent's seven-yard line late in the game. The big back got the ball and ramed five yards to the two. Same play on second down: TD. Penalty flag. Illegal motion. Second and goal from the seven. Big back for five yards. Third and goal from the two. Same play. TD. Flag. Illegal

motion. Third and goal from the seven. Same play. Five yards. Fourth and goal from the two.

Teague faked the same play to the big back and the entire opposing defense rushed to that spot. Meanwhile, a Teague receiver had run a simple out route just over the goal line and the quarterback flipped the pass toward the open man. You could almost see the grins on the faces of the quarterback and receiver.

Then, an official who had his back to the line of scrimmage, stepped into the path of the ball, it bounced off his head and Teague's opponent gained possession on the two and ran out the clock for a 7-0 win.

That's the only time in my life I thought something was fishy in a high school football game, but there was little to be done about it. Teague had several chances up to that point to win the game and failed to do so.

I warned you I was still sore. Willis Webb is a retired community newspaper editor-publisher of more than 50 years experience. He can be reached by email at wwebb1937@att.net.

Montford Urges: Let Texans Answer Gambling Questions

By John T. Montford

Our state was founded by men and women who exhibited fierce independence and self-determination. These values are manifested in our limited approach to state government and the belief that if you have a dream or an idea, Texas' friendly business climate will provide the fertile ground to grow it. Over the past few years, Texas has been the national leader in job growth and economic development. Folks are flocking to Texas from other states with their dreams in tow. Unfortunately, there is one issue where we're being outsmarted by our neighbors.

Anyone who has read the Austin American-Statesman lately knows illegal gaming has become a big industry in Texas. We have closed our eyes and allowed illegal "eight-liners" to run rampant across Texas — some within just a few miles of our Capitol. The issue is not whether Texans are gambling — they are — but whether we will reap the economic benefits of it.

Each year our fellow Texans spend more than \$2.5 billion in strategically placed, just-across-the-border gaming facilities in Oklahoma, Louisiana and New Mexico. That includes \$1 billion in Oklahoma, alone. Simply put,

Texans are creating jobs and paying for schools, firefighters and other infrastructure needs across our borders. Texas is getting fleeced by our neighbors. I firmly believe that bringing back the billions of dollars that are leaving Texas and going to our neighbor states is a service to our state. The Legislature should let us vote to stop it.

I'm not alone in this belief. Poll after poll shows that an overwhelming majority of Texas voters, regardless of political party or geographic region, believe that Texans are smart enough to decide this issue. For those who believe that gambling is morally wrong, I respectfully ask: Doesn't it make more sense to regulate an activity that good Texans are already doing in huge numbers?

Our willful blindness on this issue has also devastated the homegrown Texas horse industry. Texas should be the national epicenter of ranching and agriculture but the thoroughbred and quarter horse breeders have all but left the state for greener pastures in states where purses are enhanced with gaming proceeds. We can't even play Texas Hold 'em at our race-tracks, while a once proud part of our ranching and agricultural heritage crumbles.

The potential benefits to our economy are huge. Depending on the specifics, expanded gaming could create 75,000 permanent jobs in 40 different sectors of the economy, and it would bring several billion dollars in economic development to Texas. Gaming can be a profitable industry no different than manufacturing,

agriculture, energy or technology, that will allow Texas to expand its tax base and contribute toward our needs — whether it is schools, water resources or property tax relief. Expanded gaming is by no means a cure-all fix, and no one is proposing a casino on every corner, but it's a private enterprise with proven economic results without the need for government subsidies or handouts.

The numbers appeal to the part of me that spent many sleepless nights at the Capitol wrangling and squeezing the state budget for every last dollar and wondering how to grow our economy without raising taxes. But guess what? The gaming interests in our neighboring states are shrewd. They have gone to financial extremes to protect their Texas revenue stream. Since 2008, gaming interests in neighboring states (mostly Oklahoma) have poured about \$2 million in political contributions into Texas trying to influence our state politics. They will stop at nothing to defeat the issue at the ballot box.

Texans are smart enough to decide this issue in a statewide referendum and the Legislature has the power to make that happen. For me, this issue comes down to a pretty simple question: Are you for Texas, or are you for Oklahoma?

It's time to Let Texans Decide.

John T. Montford leads "Let Texans Decide", a coalition working to expand gaming opportunities in Texas. He was an elected district attorney, served in the Texas senate for 14 years, and the former Chancellor of Texas Tech University.