

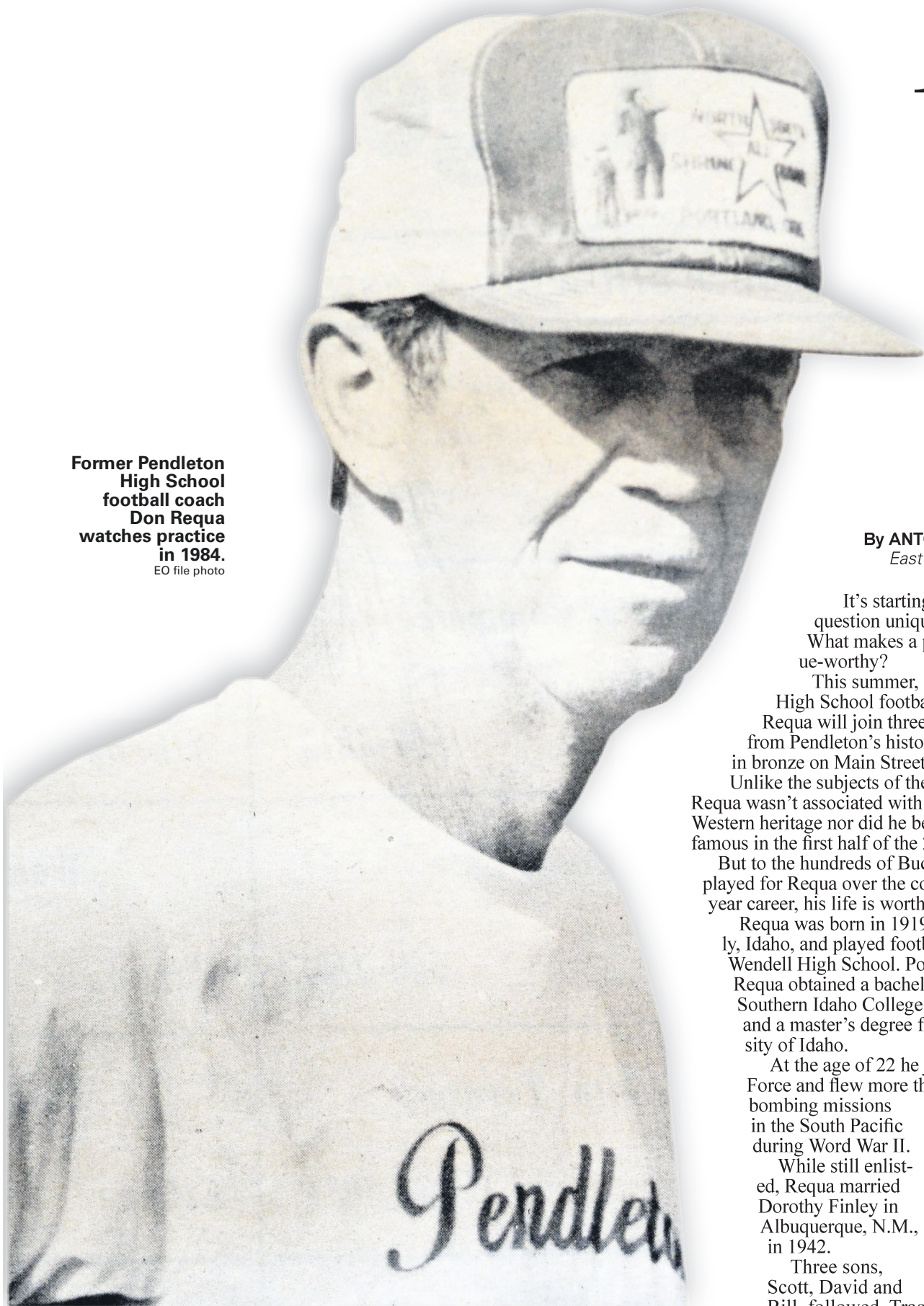
LIFESTYLES

WEEKEND, MARCH 7-8, 2015

1C

Requa's
résuméDowntown bronze would
honor 36-year career
of Pendleton High's
greatest football coach

Former Pendleton
High School
football coach
Don Requa
watches practice
in 1984.
EO file photo



By ANTONIO SIERRA
East Oregonian

It's starting to become a question unique to Pendleton: What makes a person statue-worthy?

This summer, former Pendleton High School football coach Don Requa will join three other figures from Pendleton's history immortalized in bronze on Main Street.

Unlike the subjects of the other bronzes, Requa wasn't associated with Pendleton's Western heritage nor did he become regionally famous in the first half of the 20th century.

But to the hundreds of Buckaroos that played for Requa over the course of his 36-year career, his life is worth remembering.

Requa was born in 1919 in Kimberly, Idaho, and played football at nearby Wendell High School. Post-high school, Requa obtained a bachelor's degree from Southern Idaho College of Education and a master's degree from the University of Idaho.

At the age of 22 he joined the Air Force and flew more than two dozen bombing missions in the South Pacific during World War II.

While still enlisted, Requa married Dorothy Finley in Albuquerque, N.M., in 1942.

Three sons, Scott, David and Bill, followed. Tragically, Bill would die at the age of eight in 1957 after battling an illness for more than three months, according to a story in the *East Oregonian*.

While Requa initially showed interest in becoming an airline pilot, he instead fell into the world of education and football coaching.

Requa started his coaching career at Buhl High School, a little more than 20 miles from his birthplace.

From 1946 to 1949, Requa won more games than he lost before taking the head coaching job at his alma mater, Southern Idaho College of Education.

He led Southern Idaho to a 7-3 record, but the college was shut down the next year to merge the state's education program into Idaho State University.

Without a job, Requa decided to move west and return to the high school ranks by accepting the job at Pendleton.

After losing to Washington High School in Portland, Requa got his first win for the green and gold against Pasco High School at the Round-Up Grounds en route to a 4-4 season.

"It was wide open at times and conservative at times, but it got Pendleton off to a good start to the season," the *East Oregonian* wrote of the Buckaroos' first win of 1951.

Requa struggled in the early years of his coaching tenure, including a 2-6-1 season in 1953.

Tom Melton, who befriended Requa after playing under him from 1968 to 1971, said some people were pressuring then-superintendent Wallace McCrae to fire Requa at that time.

But McCrae stood firm, and Requa rewarded his faith with a 9-1 record and a conference title the following year, quieting the naysayers.

What followed next was an unprecedented run of dominance for the Buckaroos football program.

From 1960 to 1966, Pendleton won 51 straight regular season games. Even after the streak ended,

Requa's teams took 13 conference titles.

Although not known as an elite strategist, many former players attributed Requa's success to being a master motivator.

Jon Peterson, who played quarterback for Requa from 1975 to 1978, remembers a pre-game speech the coach made about the players' mothers as a source of inspiration.

While Peterson was nearly driven to laughter at the initial concept, his demeanor started to turn as Requa described the players' mothers in the stands, driven to watch the game not for the love of football, but for their sons.

By the end of the speech, Peterson was ready to "knock down some doors and play some football."

When asked about it, Requa downplayed his motivational skills.

"That's no big deal," he was quoted as saying in a news report after his death. "Some of that stuff helps kids. Basically you have them inspired before the game or you won't get it done."

Requa could also be stingy with his praise when it came to appraising his players.

While noting that his 1986 football team could be sensational, he told people at his weekly roundtable meetings that he only had

"nine-elevenths of a good offense" and "eight-elevenths of a good defense."

Entering his third decade as Pendleton's football coach, Requa began to hint at retirement.

Requa stopped teaching high school math in 1971 and relinquished athletic director duties in 1984, bemoaning to the *East Oregonian* that his assistants had stronger relationships with his players than he did.

Requa also felt out of place in a changing educational landscape, becoming increasingly aware that his

perfectionism and short temper rubbed some people the wrong way.

"I know there are things people don't like about me, but they don't tell me," he said after his 300th win against arch-rival Hermiston High School. "I suppose some might consider me arrogant, conceited, whatever, but they don't tell me."

Although a state championship was ultimately elusive, he left Pendleton in 1986 with more than 300 victories, the most of any football coach in Oregon history at the time of his retirement.

After moving to a gated community in Tigard with his wife Dorothy, Requa died in 1987 of congestive heart failure at the age of 68.

Today, there are few traces of Requa in Pendleton, with his wife and two children also deceased.

But his legacy is felt in the players who have achieved success after their football days were over, many of whom count Requa as a reason for their success.

Locally, former players include Peterson, superintendent of the Pendleton School District, Mark Mulvihill, superintendent of the Intermountain Education Service District and Stuart Roberts, Pendleton police chief.

Beyond Pendleton city limits, football alumni have become successful business owners, attorneys and even a Pro Football Hall of Fame player, former Dallas Cowboys defensive tackle Bob Lilly.

Requa's bronze will be unveiled at Brownfield Park July 11, but looking at the accomplishments of the players he left behind, his mark has already been made.

"(I) didn't think he'd die," *East Oregonian* sports reporter Wil Phinney wrote in a column after Requa's death. "I thought he was too strong, too tough, too gruff to die. I thought he'd be around forever. I guess in some important ways he will be."

Contact Antonio Sierra at asierra@astoregonian.com or 541-966-0836.



EO file photo

Requa, center, poses for a photo during his 1951 season, with his four assistant coaches flanking him. From left to right, Wayne Scott, Chet Schiewe, Dick Nixon and Jim Inglesby.

Requa watches a Buckaroo football player practice tackling in 1984. That season, he would surpass Fred Spiegelberg of Medford's 253 victories to become the winningest high school football coach in Oregon history.
EO file photo

