

WWII veteran enjoys giving back to military, veterans and law enforcement

By SEAN HART
East Oregonian



Willard Runion sailed on the troop ship the USNS David C. Shanks during World War II.

enlist and was sent to Japan during World War II. At Okinawa, he lost vision in his right eye from the muzzle blast from an unseen enemy soldier, who also stabbed him in the leg with a bayonet.

"I didn't even see the stupid (Japanese soldier) right on the side of me — it was that dark — but my buddy did, and he killed him," Runion said. "After he killed him, he pulled that bayonet out of my leg. At least it didn't go through the bone."

Runion said he was sent to Nagasaki after the atomic bomb had been dropped there. It looked "like hell," he said, with little left standing.

After the Japanese surrendered in 1945, he said he was

stationed at Camp Drake in the Tokyo area with Gen. Douglas MacArthur. Runion said he had many interactions with the leader of the allied forces in Japan. He said he even saved MacArthur's son from falling down a mountain when he wandered off alone.

"I had never seen a tear drop out of that man's eye," Runion said. "But when I pounded on the door and said, 'Sir, here's your son,' tears came down his eyes."

After Runion was discharged from the Army in 1949, he got a job driving truck in his Ohio hometown. Four months later, he decided to "see some country," so he hitchhiked to Key West, Florida, and then across the

nation to Seattle, with a truck driver.

"When I got out of the rig, I had one stinking dime in my pocket," he said. "I put my dime in a phone box, and you would have thought I was in (Las) Vegas. Money just kept pouring out. I took my cap (to collect it). Some fell on the ground, but I had \$17 in my cap."

With the money, Runion bought a ticket to Tacoma, Washington, where he took a job driving truck and met his wife, Yvonne. The couple moved to Umatilla County in 1975 and he secured a job with Threemile Canyon Farms.

Runion said he retired more than 20 years ago, but remained active in veteran and military service organizations. He has received the Veterans of Oregon Honorable Service Medal and a U.S. Army Freedom Team Salute commendation, as well as multiple certificates of appreciation from the groups in which he participated.

Runion continued giving back to law enforcement organizations as well. He has made monthly donations to the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund for the last 15 years, along with the recent donation to the deputy sheriff's association.

"Everybody says, 'I'm proud of you, Bill,'" he said.

BMCC: Will use proceeds to stay ahead of costs

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Hermiston, Pendleton and Milton-Freewater. Instead, the money will most likely offset rising construction costs.

"The price of steel and gas are going up," Preus said. "We are holding that premium aside as a contingency because we see costs increasing over time."

The college is using some of the premium to pay the bond's administrative costs, including \$13,000 to S&P for the rating and another couple thousand dollars to the state of Oregon for serving as guarantor.

Insko said the bond rating report from S&P commented favorably not only on the college, but the stability of the entire area during the recession and the region's low unemployment rate.

With bond proceeds, four campuses and centers — Pendleton, Boardman, Hermiston and Milton-Freewater — will receive updates in campus security and technology.

Construction for three workforce development programs will begin this winter or spring. The Workforce & Early Childhood Training Center comes up first on the construction schedule. On its heels are the Precision Irrigated Agriculture Center in Hermiston, renovation of an existing agriculture center in Pendleton and an overhaul of the front entryway at the Milton-Freewater center.

The agriculture center renovation on the main campus in Pendleton will add approximately 15,000 square feet and cost around

\$4.2 million, though state matching dollars, up to \$3.3 million, are available. The 13,300-square-foot workforce training center in Boardman will cost an estimated \$4.7 million. Hermiston's 12,000-square-foot precision agriculture center will require an outlay of approximately \$3.3 million.

"Projects will be done concurrently," Preus said. "We want to be finished by September of 2017."

The project manager, Frew Development Group, headquartered in Denver, is familiar to many in Eastern Oregon as the company that is designing and constructing the Eastern Oregon Trade and Event Center. The college is also finalizing negotiations with LKV Architects of Boise. Architects will rely on feedback from a design team that includes faculty members and industry stakeholders.

An oversight committee will monitor the construction process. The group, which will meet quarterly, is composed of citizens of Umatilla and Morrow counties, people from various industries and BMCC board members, said Vice-President of Public Relations Casey White-Zollman. The group's monthly reports will be posted to the college website.

"BMCC wants to be as transparent as possible during this process," White-Zollman said.

Taxpayers will pay 25 cents per \$1,000 of assessed value for 15 years.

Contact Kathy Aney at kaney@eastoregonian.com or call 541-966-0810.

FIRE: Must borrow money from fire prevention to cover costs

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of 120 soldiers will begin training immediately before being deployed.

Earlier in the day, Oregon State Forester Doug Decker and Forest Service Chief Tom Tidwill joined Brown during a visit with victims who lost their homes to the Canyon Creek fire. The Grant County Sheriff's Office now estimates 36 homes burned to the ground, although no injuries have been reported.

"There has been some tremendous work done to get everyone out safely," Tidwill said.

By Wednesday afternoon, activity once again increased on the fire lines. Crews along Canyon Creek Lane were forced to retreat to the west side of Wickiup Campground as a giant plume of smoke lifted high over the ridge. Farther south, the town of Seneca, population 200, is on early watch for evacuation notices.

On the opposite side of the road, flames also crept in short grass and logs, occasionally jumping high enough to reach the lower

branches of pines. Safety officers kept firefighters back to avoid becoming inadvertently trapped.

"It's just (because of) how extreme it gets so quickly," said Mike Gorsuch, Oregon State Fire Marshal's Office.

Damon Simmons, fire information officer, said it is easy for crews to lose their situational awareness and become surrounded if they are not careful.

Simmons, who usually works as a lieutenant with Portland Fire and Rescue, said all agencies are doing everything they can to contain the fire with the resources they have at their disposal. When people lose their homes, he said it's a tough pill for everyone to swallow.

"You feel like you wish we could have done more, or that we could have been here earlier," Simmons said. "It's hard for people."

Christie Timko, who has a private law practice and works as a judge for Harney County Drug Court, attended the meeting Wednesday at Canyon City Community Hall. Timko and

her husband, Oregon State Police senior trooper Erich Timko, lived about 8 miles down the canyon south of Canyon City before losing their house Friday, in the blaze.

Timko said the meeting was respectful, though some people's frustrations showed through — especially concerning perceived mismanagement of federal forests.

"(The message) was just a request that practices be put in place for the long-term health and safety of the forest and communities that surround it," Timko said.

The Timkos are currently staying in a friend's vacant home near Dayville. It has been a difficult adjustment, especially for their children, 6-year-old Cajsja Jo and 3-year-old Chance. But generous donations from the community have helped immensely, she said.

"My heart just goes out to everybody who has lost everything," she said. "There are so many people who will suffer a lot more from this than we will."

Brown told a gathering

of media that the state will do everything it can to make sure residents have the tools, resources and knowledge they need to rebuild.

Brown and Tidwill also discussed the need to change how funding for firefighting works at the federal level.

Currently, the Forest Service pays for fighting wildfire out of its general fund budget. Brown said that is unrealistic under the looming threat of megafires, and said the agency needs access to disaster relief funding.

When the Forest Service pays for larger, more expensive fires, it must borrow money from other programs including fire prevention — a practice known as "fire-borrowing." Tidwill said if they can stop fire borrowing, they could focus on treating more areas in the future to reduce wildfire severity.

"We just need to be able to accelerate the scope and pace of what we're doing," Tidwill said.

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CRICKET: Holding a memorial get-together Sunday at 2 p.m.

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Hamblin remembers sitting with his bare feet propped up on the seat across the aisle when a semi-truck lost its brakes on the grade and smashed into the bus. He needed 42 stitches to his leg and foot, but Miller had it worse.

"She was sitting in the seat right next to me and the stuff that hit me hit her on top of the head," Hamblin said.

Miller was paralyzed, cheerleading advisor Rhonda Yost was killed and a handful of other students were sent to the hospital.

Hamblin said after Miller returned home he began visiting her and the two formed a bond that lasted throughout Miller's life. He said even though Miller lived most of her adult life in Las Vegas, many classmates kept in touch with her and stopped in for a visit when they were in the area.

"When I felt down and

out I would call her and she would always have some smart-aleck comment about how I didn't have it that bad," he said. "You would text her and she would text back these phenomenal sayings."

By other classmates' accounts, Miller didn't let her quadriplegic status get in the way of her life plan. She needed a caretaker to help her out of bed in the mornings but other than that managed to live independently and hold down a steady job at the Thomas and Mack Convention Center in Las Vegas. She even worked as a model, fulfilling a dream she had before the accident.

"She was such a sweet person and we all learned some lessons from her," Herrera said.

Bob Fordice said Miller was a big influence on his life during his late teens.

"I was awfully fond of her before the accident, but we became best friends after," he said.

He said he was a "big goof-

ball" in those days and Miller, who didn't have a shy bone in her body, was always good for a laugh, even after her world was turned upside-down.

"She was very quick-witted," he said. "Very funny. You couldn't get anything past her without a comeback."

He said Miller always destroyed people's stereotypical notions of people who are quadriplegic with her outgoing sense of humor and propensity for taking care of others.

"She was probably the toughest person you'd ever meet on the inside, but on the outside she was the kindest person. She never met a stranger," he said.

Hamblin and his wife are hosting a memorial get-together for Miller at their home at 816 E. Main St. in Hermiston on Sunday at 2 p.m.

The class of 1980 is also collecting money for the Cricket Miller Memorial Scholarship. One alumnus has already offered to match anything raised up to \$1,000

for this year's scholarship. The money raised will go to a student, selected by local teachers, who has been an example of overcoming hardship. Donations can be made in care of the Hermiston Bulldogs Booster Club.

Contact Jade McDowell at jmcdowell@eastoregonian.com or 541-564-4536.

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