

Funny thing happened on way to Algiers...

By Steve Tool
Wallowa County Chieftain

It's like a scene from an old movie. Maybe something Humphrey Bogart would star in.

In 1943, four World War II soldiers from Wallowa County, serving in different units, accidentally meet each other on the streets of Algiers in north Africa. Those soldiers spend one day together: reminiscing, posing for a street artist caricature and spending the evening in a bar.

But this is not the scene from Casablanca. It's a real-life incident that happened to four local men who had that chance meeting in a city that then was home to 8 million people.

Forrest Wilson, a resident of Wallowa Lake Village, is the son of one of the soldiers in this story. Wilson had read a Nov. 9 *Chieftain* story about former Wallowa County resident Gayle Stockdale, and a light flashed in his head.

"When I saw the Stockdale writeup, I said, 'My God, I think this is one of the four.' And I went and dug out (the caricature art) out of my dad's wartime stuff," he said.

The caricatures depict all four men in their respective duties. Lt. Robert "Bruce" Wilson, Forrest's father, is seen driving construction equipment, Capt. Gayle Stockdale is driving a tank, Warrant Officer Bud Jones is flying a British airplane and Lt. Charles C. Thorpe is drawn with artillery. Either a bottle or a glass of spirits is also depicted in each character.

Wilson's father was raised on a Wallowa County farm. He moved to Hawaii with his brother to combat the tough times of the Great Depression. He eventually obtained construction work at the Army Air Force's Hickam Field and watched the Pearl Harbor attack unfold before his eyes.

Robert Wilson immediately enlisted but was initially turned down because he was too old — he was 36 at the time. However, he had a degree from the University of Oregon, and after he passed a physical fitness test, the Army enrolled him in Officers Candidate School and assigned him to the Army Corps of Engineers.

"He would have been



Steve Tool/Chieftain

The caricature drawing, now laminated and in possession of Forrest Wilson, son of Lt. Robert "Bruce" Wilson at the far left. The other Wallowans, from left, are Lt. Gayle Stockdale, Warrant Officer Bud Jones and Lt. Charles C. Thorpe.

crushed if he hadn't been able to get involved," said Forrest Wilson. "That was the big thing in his life, and it was the big thing in all their lives."

Wilson was running supply missions for the Corps in the North African campaign. He found himself in Algiers and went for a stroll.

"He said he was walking through town and ran into another Wallowa County boy. In those days they all knew each other — it wasn't like Wallowa, Enterprise and Joseph were separate," Wilson said.

He is no longer sure which one his father ran into first, but they headed to a local watering hole for a drink, where they eventually ran into two others doing the same thing.

"My dad really liked the idea that all four of them ran into each other, so they decided to go out on the street and have these caricatures drawn. I don't know if it was my dad's idea to have them drawn, but since he ended up with it, I assume it was his idea," Wilson said.

Forrest first saw the caricature when he was about 10, when his father was going through his war collection.

His father remembered that day vividly.

"My dad just talked about how much fun it was just to sit there and reminisce about Wallowa County instead of what was going on," Forrest said.

To the best of Forrest Wilson's recollection, the men never again met during the war, but his father and Stockdale returned and talked on occasion. Robert Wilson tried farming on leased land in Wallowa County, but eventually went to work at the Han-

ford Project in south-central Washington, commuting back and forth to spend time with his family, who still resided in Wallowa County. After a severe accident during his Hanford commute, he decided to return to college and become a teacher. He eventually found employment as a teacher at Willows, Calif., where he remained the rest of his life. He passed away in his sleep on Dec. 2, 1981. He was 75.

Although that chance meeting happened more than 70 years ago a half a world away, Wilson still shakes his head in wonder.

"Think of it. Four guys from Wallowa County, none of them coming over together, but running into each other in a city like Algiers," he said. "It's very unique, the odds are phenomenal."

Fishtrap open house draws patrons

By Steve Tool
Wallowa County Chieftain

Several dozen people attended Fishtrap's Dec. 16 open house at their location on 400 E. Grant St.

Fishtrap is a literary nonprofit dedicated to clear thinking and writing in and about the west. Visitors were treated to a night of Christmas music as well as a table of hors d'oeuvres and the opportunity to talk with Fishtrap staff.

Fishtrap program manager Mike Midlo said it was his third or fourth holiday open house.

"I'm always impressed by who comes. Some people I only see once or twice all year long, and they come to this to help bring in the holiday season. It's really nice with all the things going on in the holiday season that they take time for Fishtrap, and we're happy to have

them," he said.

Midlo said 2016 was a successful year for the organization, with progress on several fronts — particularly with Fishtrap Story Lab. Story Lab is a program in conjunction with local schools that encourages children to tell stories through the use of multimedia.

"We started this in Joseph two years ago, and now it's moved down the valley into Enterprise, the alternative school, Wallowa," he said.

Midlo added that story labs intended for the community are well-attended, too.

"It's brought a new group of people: kids, students, adults and educators into Fishtrap," Midlo said.

Fishtrap Fireside, a monthly gathering at Fishtrap that allows local writers to air their work in front of an audience, is another program growing by leaps and bounds.

"This is the fourth season and every month it's full," said Midlo. "Amy Zahm is curating it, and she's just bringing in a diversity of folks, age groups, genders; folks from around the county that you would never expect had a story in them come up and read at Fishtrap Fireside, and that's what we're about."

Executive director Shannon McNerney has also played a role in Fishtrap's growth. Midlo said she has built and strengthened connections with community organizations and individuals this year.

In the immediate future, Midlo said that Fishtrap is preparing for this year's Big Read, which is a weeks-long Fishtrap community effort to explore a book selected by the community for in-depth study. This year's selection is the Vietnam War-era classic: "The Things They Carried" by Tim O'Brien.

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NEOEDD receives partnership grant

By Wallowa County Chieftain

The Oregon Community Foundation awarded a \$10,000 grant to the Northeastern Oregon Economic Development District in Enterprise.

The grant is intended facilitate a partnership with Business Oregon's new statewide Rural Entrepreneurial Development Initiative (REDI) to build a network of centers to meet the resource and technology needs of entrepreneurs at different stages and locations throughout the region.

Births

A son,
Lukas Jeffrey Weis
was born December 2, 2016 in Lewiston to Alison Curry and David Weis of Lewiston. Grandparents are Jeff and Jane Curry.

A son,
Ryle David Smith
was born December 5, 2016 in Enterprise to Rowdy and Linzi Smith of Enterprise. Grandparents are Joni and Randy Strohm, and Donna and John Smith.

A son,
Uriah James King
was born December 5, 2016 in Enterprise to Amanda Palmer of Enterprise. Grandparents are Becky and Jim Dockery.

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