

Billy Walkabout, decorated Vietnam War hero, dies at 57

HARTFORD, Conn. (AP) — Billy Walkabout, a native Cherokee whose actions in Vietnam made him among most decorated soldiers of the war, died March 7 at a hospital in Norwich, his stepdaughter said Sunday.

He was 57. Walkabout received the Distinguished Service Cross, Purple Heart, five Silver Stars and five Bronze Stars. He was believed to be the most decorated Native American soldier of the Vietnam War, according to U.S. Department of Defense reports.

Walkabout, who lived in Montville, died of pneumonia and renal failure, said his stepdaughter, Randi Johnson of Norwich.

He had experienced complications related to his exposure to the Agent Orange defoliant used during the Vietnam conflict, she said, and he had been on a kidney transplant waiting list and undergoing dialysis three times a week.

However, had not been seriously ill until his immunity weakened recently and he developed pneumonia, Johnson said.

Walkabout was born in Cherokee County, Okla., on March 31, 1949, and lived much of his life in Oklahoma before moving to eastern Connecticut about seven years ago.

At the time of his death, Walkabout and his wife, Juanita Medbury-Walkabout, lived in a portion of eastern Connecticut that is home to many Mashantucket Pequot, Mohegan and other Native American tribal members.

Walkabout, a Cherokee of the Blue Holley Clan, was an 18-year-old Army Ranger sergeant when he and 12 other soldiers were sent on an assassination mission behind enemy lines on Nov. 20, 1968, in a region southwest of Hue.

However, they ended up in the enemy's battalion area and came under fire for hours, during which he was seriously wounded. Several of the other 12 men were killed at the scene,

while the rest later died of their injuries.

Walkabout's citation for the Distinguished Service Cross said he simultaneously returned fire, helped his comrades and boarded other injured soldiers onto evacuation helicopters.

"Although stunned and wounded by the blast, Sgt. Walkabout rushed from man to man administering first aid, bandaging one soldier's severe chest wound and reviving another soldier by heart massage," the citation states. "Only when the casualties had been evacuated and friendly reinforcements had arrived, did he allow himself to be evacuated."

He retired at the rank of second lieutenant. In a 1986 interview with The Associated Press, Walkabout said his 23 months in Vietnam left him with disabling injuries and memories that refused to fade.

"War is not hell," Walkabout said. "It's worse."

He said he struggled with failed marriages, thoughts of suicide and years of self-isola-

tion when he would spend six months at a time alone.

"Everyone I went to high school with thought I was dead for years. They're amazed when they see me and they say, 'You're not dead,'" Walkabout said.

He said he often refused to sleep near his wife, afraid he would strangle her in his sleep or try to push her under the bed to protect her from the bombs he imagined were going off.

Over the years, however, he found solace in the Native American powwows where he often was an honored guest, leading the traditional dances in time to the pounding drums and chant of the singers.

"I'm at peace with myself," Walkabout said in 1986. "I've got my dignity and I've got my pride. ... I never lost the war in Vietnam, I never lost a day of it. Even when I was wounded, I didn't lose. When I fought, I won. I won my wars."

Preserving languages goal of grant program

BROWNING, Mont. (AP) — Preserving what remains of some American Indian languages is the goal of a grant program planned by the National Council of the Lewis and Clark Bicentennial.

The council said grants to be offered later this year, in amounts from \$2,500 to \$25,000, are intended to fund tribal language programs offered through schools and communities. Mandan, which was critical to the success of the Lewis and Clark expedition, is

among the fading languages.

Members of a committee that will guide allocation of the grants include Browning resident Darrell Kipp. He founded the Piegan Institute, which strives to research and preserve languages.

Kipp described American Indian languages as "libraries of ancient knowledge" and said that when a language dies, "that wisdom is lost forever."

Funding for the grants includes interest on proceeds from sales of a Lewis and Clark commemorative coin.

Church Revival

There will be a Church Revival at the Full Gospel Church from Saturday, March 24 through Friday, March 30. Services begin each evening at 7 p.m.

This is the third year of the Revival, hosted by Easton and Tina Aguilar.

Guest speakers at Full Gospel

Merle and Rose Williams of 16-17 at the Full Gospel Tulalip, Wash., will be guest Chrch. The meetings begin at speakers at meetings on Saturday and Sunday evening, March 7 p.m.

VFW Laides Auxiliary offering scholarships through patriotic art contest

Young artists are invited to submit their artwork in the Ladies Auxiliary Young American Creative Patriotic Art Scholarship Contest. The deadline to submit items is March 31.

Students must be in the grades 9, 10, 11 or 12 to enter the contest.

For information contact Pinky Beymer, president of the VFW Warm Springs Ladies

Auxiliary Elliott Palmer Post 4217; or Lucy Gadberry at 553-0492.

In the national competition, the first-place winner receives a \$10,000 scholarship. Second place receives \$5,000; and third place, \$2,500.

Winning entries will be displayed at the Auxiliary National Convention.

Entries must be done during

the current school year. Each student may submit only one entry.

Each entry will be judged on the originality of concept, presentation, and patriotism expressed; the content of how it relates to patriotism and clarity of ideas; the design technique, total impact of the work; and uniqueness.

Award: 'It is quite an honor for us'

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They received the award during the annual Northwest Dispatch Conference recently, Lydy said, and it came as quite a surprise.

"Usually I'm not speechless, but I was that night," Lydy said. "We're pretty proud of it."

In the past, Lydy said, only one other facility with the Bureau of Indian Affairs has received the award: the Yakama Nation in 1992.

"It's something that does not happen to small offices," Lydy said. "It is quite an honor for us."

Most offices that receive the award have a staff of at least eight people who work full-time throughout the year.

In Warm Springs, only two people work in the dispatch office in the summertime.

According to Lydy, that often means a lot of extra work on the part of the two employees. He said, "Whether it be seven in the morning or midnight, they're here."

Norman Lucei has worked with Fire Management for over two decades—and since 1994 he's worked in dispatch, he said.

Now, as the Initial Attack Dispatcher, Lucei is humble about the work that he does.

"It's pretty busy," he said—especially because during four days of the week, only one person is in the office.

In fact, during the summer Lucei is on-call 24 hours a day.

"We're lucky if we get an eight hour day during the summertime," Lucei said. "Especially if it's really dry."

Luckily, Lucei said, during the summer they have people from Forestry who are also trained in dispatch.

For Lucei, the answer isn't simple as to why he stays motivated.

"The smell of smoke, I guess, is what everyone says," he

explained. "When the smoke bell rings, everyone runs."

As for the award, Lucei said, "It kind of stunned me a little bit when they announced our names."

Lucei agreed that it was an honor for a smaller office to receive the award.

"There's a whole lot of other dispatch offices that are a lot bigger than this one," he added.

Brenden named Kah-Nee-Ta Star Performer of the Year

Sheila Brenden, who works at the Kah-Nee-Ta High Desert Resort and Casino kitchen, was recently named the resort Star Performer for 2006. She was nominated for her great attitude and outstanding customer service. Congratulations, Sheila!



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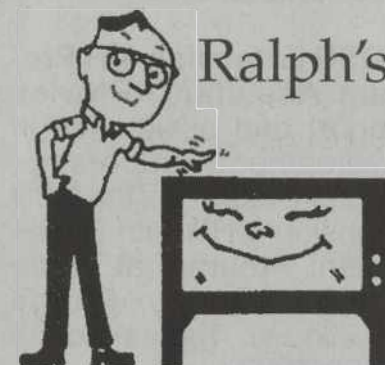


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