

# Gunny Brandon walks on at age 80

By Dean Rhodes

*Smoke Signals editor*

Longtime McMinnville resident Percy Eugene “Gunny” Brandon, who was a fixture at many Grand Ronde Memorial Day celebrations, passed away on Friday, Jan. 8, at the Lebanon veterans’ care home after a long, arduous journey with cancer in the form of multiple myeloma. He was 80 years old.

Family members surrounded him the days before he passed peacefully.

Gunny was born on the Rosebud Sioux Indian Reservation in South Dakota on June 29, 1935, to Howard and Bertha Brandon. His family moved to Oregon in 1942 and lived in Salem, Grand Ronde and McMinnville.

Gunny attended Grand Ronde Grade School and Willamina High School, where he played on the 1950 all-star basketball team. However, he did not graduate because he joined the U.S Marine Corps in 1953 at the age of 17. He was inspired to enlist after his older brother was killed on Iwo Jima during World War II.

Gunnery Sgt. Brandon retired in 1973 after deployments in Japan, Korea and Vietnam, where he served two tours of duty and received four Purple Hearts, which are awarded in the name of the President to servicemen and women who are wounded or killed while serving their country. He also received a Navy Commendation and Cross of Valor.

In Vietnam, he served with Fox



*Smoke Signals file photo*

**Percy Eugene “Gunny” Brandon speaks during the Tribe’s Memorial Day observance held at the West Valley Veterans Memorial in May 2014. Brandon passed away on Friday, Jan. 8, at the age of 80.**

Company of the 2nd Battalion 4th Marines, known as the “Magnificent Bastards,” in the battle of Dai Do. During the battle, which occurred in spring 1968, about 400 Marines faced more than 3,000 North Vietnamese Army regulars. Ninety-four Marines were killed and most of the rest were wounded, including Brandon.

Despite his injuries, Brandon returned to the front lines only to be more seriously injured a few weeks later. He spent almost three years in the hospital, recuperating and learning to walk again. He

still carried shrapnel from his wounds and continued to deal with post-traumatic stress disorder.

Gunny returned to McMinnville to recover completely from injuries suffered in Vietnam. He worked for Triangle Motors, Home Laundry, Rowell Wickersham and the News-Register newspaper. He also owned and operated four businesses: St. Paul Rodeo Inn, Vets Club American Legion Post 21, Northwest Asphalt and Gunny’s Gym with his wife, Shirlye.

He was a true patriot. After his retirement, he moonlighted, installing and donating U.S. flagpoles. He also had a passion for community service, sponsoring girls’ softball and Little League teams and Hood-to-Coast relay teams.

Gunny participated in local festivals, parades and ran for election as a Yamhill County commissioner. His involvement with Native American organizations and community found him dressed as Santa Claus, a gorilla and in traditional Native American regalia. He was a noted lecturer and forum panelist on combat and Marine Corps life, as well as post-traumatic stress disorder.

Gunny completed his GED in 1964, but also was awarded an honorary high school diploma from Willamina High School after 50 years in 2004. In 1993, under the supervision of a veteran’s counselor, he began to write the contents of a book “Gunny, A Story About a Marine Gunnery Sergeant” that would later be published and now is in its third edition. He conducted a book signing in the Tribal Governance Center in November 2007.

He was preceded in death by his wife, Shirlye; three brothers,

Howard (Stubby) Brandon, John Brandon and Gary Brandon; sisters, Joyce Brandon, Mary (Bitsey) White, Leona (Toni) Stoneman and Geraldine Anderson; and his parents, Howard and Bertha Brandon.

Gunny is survived by his brother, Bill (Pam) Brandon of Sisters, Ore.; three children, Jan Hulke and Rita Van Dyke of McMinnville and Russell (Lynne) Brandon of Sitka, Alaska; eight grandchildren, Darriek (Jacque) Bruns of Corvallis, Ore., Kayle (Kelly) Clayton of Creswell, Ore., Crissandra Van Dyke of McMinnville, Tanner (Krystal) Brandon of Chattanooga, Tenn., Tyne Brandon of Cleveland, Ohio, Ocia Hartley, Abra Cook and Kayb Joseph; and four great-grandchildren, Henry and Avery Bruns, Eero Brandon and Harper Clayton.

Funeral services will be held at 10 a.m. Wednesday, Jan. 20, at Evergreen Chapel, 500 N.E. Captain Michael King Smith Way, McMinnville. Interment will be at Willamette National Cemetery in Portland.

Tribal Council Chairman Reyn Leno requested at the Tuesday, Jan. 12, Legislative Action Committee meeting that the Tribe send a Tribal Pendleton blanket to the family in honor of Gunny’s frequent participation in Tribal veteran-oriented events and to acknowledge his service.

“He was a big part of our community,” Leno said. “He was a big supporter of all the veterans events. He was a well-decorated Marine. He was a big piece of our memorial ... he came out to our memorial all the time and brought his (Iwo Jima) statue.”

The family suggests donations in Gunny’s behalf be made to the Semper Fi Fund at [www.semperfifund.org](http://www.semperfifund.org).

*Includes information from the Yamhill County News-Register.*

## KEEP SALMON OFF DRUGS

## PROTECT SALMON AND WATERWAYS

Take unused perscriptions to local law enforcement agencies or collection facilities for safe disposal

**OREGON RESIDENTS:**

[www.deq.state.or.us/lq/sw/hhw/pharmaceuticals.htm](http://www.deq.state.or.us/lq/sw/hhw/pharmaceuticals.htm)

Flushing prescription drugs down the toilet puts aquatic life at risk. Salmon need clean water to survive, and these chemicals have harmful effects on behavior, growth, and reproduction. Dispose of drugs properly and keep salmon habitat healthy.

A HEALTH TEXT MESSAGING SERVICE FOR AMERICAN INDIAN AND ALASKA NATIVE TEENS AND YOUNG ADULTS

## WERNATIVE

For weekly health tips, contests, and life advice  
text **NATIVE** to 24587

Please encourage young people in your community to sign up.

Topics include:

- Teachings from Native leaders
- Wellness and Life Balance
- Family Relationships
- Mental Health
- Tobacco, Drugs and Alcohol
- Violence and Bullying
- Peer Pressure
- Sexual Health
- Healthy Relationships
- School Pressures
- Getting Help
- Quizzes, polls, and discussions
- Scholarships, conferences, internships

\*Standard rates apply. It's just like texting your friends and family.

In 2012, the Northwest Portland Area Indian Health Board will launch a companion website: [www.wernative.org](http://www.wernative.org). The site is being designed for Native youth, by Native youth, to encourage healthy behaviors, share youth-friendly media and current events, increase cultural identity and pride, and share the positive impacts Native youth are having on their communities.

Funded by the National IHS HIV Program

For more information, please contact Jessica Leston: [jleston@npihb.org](mailto:jleston@npihb.org) or visit us at: <http://www.npihb.org/epicenter/project/projectredtalon>

