

FLAG

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One of those now hangs in Baker City Hall, in recognition of Michael Hoff.

"This town is where the POW-MIA Flag story starts," the organization wrote in a recent post on its Facebook page.

The Baker City connection

Ogawa said her father attended St. Francis Academy in Baker City before graduating from Baker High School in 1954.

She still has her father's BHS diploma.

Michael Hoff attended Eastern Oregon College in La Grande for a year or two before joining the Navy in February 1957.

"That was his dream — to fly jets," Ogawa said.

He earned his pilot's wings in 1959 and began the itinerant life typical of a Navy aviator.

Hoff met his future wife, Mary, in Pensacola, Florida.

Ogawa said her mother grew up in Michigan.

The couple had five children in seven years.

"We used to joke that they had a kid at every base where they were stationed," Ogawa said with a laugh.

Ogawa said her father, rather than fearing combat, was afraid he would miss a chance to serve his country in war.

"He really wanted to do his part," she said.

Although Ogawa was so young when her father disappeared that she can't remember him, she looks occasionally at photographs and marvels at what she sees.

One photo in particular, taken in September 1967.

In the photo her father



Suzanne Hoff Ogawa/Contributed Photo

This photo taken in September 1967 shows Michael Hoff holding his infant daughter, Suzanne and with his three younger sons: Robert, front, Charles, far left, and Michael, background.

is holding her, an infant, while her three older brothers look on.

"I don't remember my father but I know I heard his voice," Ogawa said.

Ogawa said that although her father had relatives in Oregon, mainly in the Portland area, she doesn't believe he visited Baker City after joining the Navy.

His name is on the memorial on the east side of the Baker County Courthouse that lists local residents who have died in war.

What happened to Michael Hoff?

Ogawa said her mother was never satisfied with the lack of information about what befell her husband on that January day over Laos.

"She was angry at the government," Ogawa said. "She just wanted to get answers."

Ogawa believes the lack of clarity had much to do with where her father was flying — over Laos, not Vietnam.

Ogawa has a Western Union telegram that her

mother sent to Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, seeking information about Michael Hoff.

About 20 years later, Ogawa said her family learned that Michael Hoff probably died the day his plane was shot down.

His best friend, who was the squadron leader, reported seeing Hoff's plane, upside down and flying just a couple thousand feet above the ground. The other pilot didn't see a parachute.

Although her father's actual fate remains a mystery, Ogawa said she strives to focus instead on what her mother accomplished — a legacy that is displayed in thousands of places across the county in the form of the POW-MIA flag.

Ogawa said she's thankful for both of her parents.

She remembers how her mother's efforts, on behalf of her family and of so many other families, brought people solace in the most difficult times.

"I think it's beautiful how these women and families banded together," Ogawa said.

COUNTY

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Nichols, who was reelected to a four-year term in 2020, has proposed the possibility of having the chairman position rotated among the three elected commissioners on an annual basis.

That's the system some other counties, including Union and Wallowa, use.

Baker County Commissioners will have a preliminary discussion of the idea during a work session Wednesday, Nov. 10 at 1:30 p.m. at the Courthouse, 1995 Third St. Commissioners won't be making any decisions.

Nichols said he decided to broach the subject because both Harvey and Bennett have terms that expire at the end of 2022, and both have said they don't intend to seek reelection.

That would potentially result in the board of commissioners,

starting in 2023, having two of its three members with no experience in county governance, Nichols said.

His four-year term continues through the end of 2024.

"What I would like to see happen is each January 1st, this is just my personal thought right now, that the three commissioners pick a chair and begin rotating that," Nichols said.

Nichols said the commissioner chosen to serve as chair for the year could decline the position.

The two other commissioners could also vote to replace the current chair with a different commissioner.

Nichols said the rotation system for the chair would allow all commissioners to be more familiar with operating the county.

Although shifting to the rotation system could result in Nichols becoming the chair in 2023, as he would be the only incumbent, he said that's not his goal.

"It may seem like I want the chair; I really don't care to be the chair but I would just to get this thing started and going in the right direction," Nichols said.

He has talked to other counties and commissioners and found they are pleased with the rotation system for choosing the chair.

"I've heard nothing negative about it," Nichols said.

Nichols ran against Harvey for the chairman position in the 2018. Harvey won the election and his second four-year term.

Bennett's position is approximately three-quarters time, and Nichols' is about half-time.

Bennett's salary for the previous fiscal year was \$36,156, but has increased to \$55,836 for the current fiscal year to account for additional responsibilities during the pandemic.

Nichols' salary for the previous fiscal year was \$18,072, and was increased for the current fiscal year to \$37,224.

SURVEY

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In response, McCarty, who is represented by attorney Janet K. Larsen of Portland, sought a preliminary injunction that would block the county from proceeding with that process.

On July 29, Senior Judge Stephen P. Forte granted McCarty a temporary restraining order that prohibits the county from continuing that process.

Attorneys from both sides — the county is represented by Robert Franz of Springfield — made arguments during an Oct. 14 hearing before Senior Judge Russell B. West.

West made his written ruling on Thursday, Nov. 5.

He dissolved the temporary restraining order that had prohibited the county from surveying part of McCarty's property.

West also declined to issue a preliminary injunction based on McCarty's contention that the county has failed to comply with

his requests for records under Oregon's Public Records Law.

West's decision allows the county to conduct the survey giving McCarty at least one week notice, and complying with any safety restrictions related to logging on McCarty's land.

West ruled that continuing to prevent the county from pursuing a designation of the road as public would not be in the public interest, since doing so "could potentially exclude the public for a significant period of time from important access to public lands that they may very well have a right to ..."

West wrote that Forte, the judge who issued the temporary restraining order, did so without notifying the county or giving the county a chance to respond.

Forte, West determined, did not have the authority to halt the county's effort to declare the road through McCarty's property as a public right-of-way.

West heard testimony from several people during the Oct.

14 hearing, including Ken Helgeson, who retired as Baker County Roadmaster.

Helgeson, who lives near Pine Creek, testified that he has traveled the road across McCarty's property as a private citizen, and as roadmaster he used county equipment to repair flood damage to the road.

Helgeson said the county does not have a deeded easement across McCarty's property, but he testified that he believes the road is a public access route through RS 2477, an 18th century federal law.

As for McCarty's claims about the county failing to provide records under the Public Records Law, West wrote the county "has offered substantial evidence that it has complied with the records requests ..."

West concluded that it would not be in the public interest to grant McCarty a preliminary injunction based on McCarty's claims about the county failing to comply with public records requests.

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