

# The death of Captain Waskow

*Editor's note: Pulitzer Prize-winning World War II correspondent Ernie Pyle wrote the following column after a stay with the 36th Division units near Mignano and Venafro, Italy. Pyle was later killed on April 18, 1945, by Japanese forces. The Bulletin runs this column each year near Memorial Day.*

In this war I have known a lot of officers who were loved and respected by the soldiers under them. But never have I crossed the trail of any man as beloved as Capt. Henry T. Waskow, of Belton, Texas.

Capt. Waskow was a company commander in the 36th Division. He had led his company since long before it left the States. He was very young, only in his mid-20s, but he carried in him a sincerity and a gentleness that made people want to be guided by him.

"After my own father, he came next," a sergeant told me.

"He always looked after us," a soldier said. "He'd go to bat for us every time."

"I've never known him to do anything unfair," another one said.

I was at the foot of the mule trail the night they brought Capt. Waskow's body down the mountain. The moon was nearly full at the time, and you could see far up the trail and even partway across the valley. Soldiers made shadows as they walked.

Dead men had been coming down the mountain all evening, lashed onto the backs of mules. They came lying belly-down across wooden pack saddles, their heads hanging down on the left side of the mule, their stiffened legs sticking out awkwardly from the other side bobbing up and down as the mule walked.

The Italian mule-skinners were afraid to walk beside dead men, so Americans had to lead the mules down that night. Even the Americans were reluctant to unlash and lift off the bodies at the bottom, so an officer had to do it himself and ask others to help.

The first one came in early in the evening. They slid him down from the mule and stood him on his feet for a moment.

In the half light, he might have been merely a sick man standing there, leaning on the others. Then they laid him on the ground in the shadow of the low stone wall alongside the road.

I don't know who that first one was. You feel small in the presence of the dead men and ashamed of being alive, and you don't ask silly questions.

We left him there beside the road, that first one, and we all went back into the cowshed and sat on water cans or laid on the straw, waiting for the next batch of mules.

Somebody said the dead soldier had been dead for four days, and then nobody said anything more about it. We talked soldier talk for an hour or more. The dead man lay all alone outside, in the shadow of the stone wall.

Then a soldier came into the dark cowshed and said there were some more bodies outside. We went out into the road.

Four mules stood there, in the moonlight, in the road where the trail came down off the mountain. The soldiers who led them stood there waiting.

"This one is Capt. Waskow," one of them said quietly.

Two men unslashed his body from the mule and lifted it off and lay it in the shadow beside the low stone wall. Other men took the other bodies off.

Finally there were five, lying end to end in a long row alongside the road.

You don't cover up dead men in the combat zone. They just lie there in the shadows until somebody else comes after them.

The unburdened mules moved off to their olive orchard.

The men in the road seemed reluctant to leave.

They stood around, and gradually one by one you could sense them moving close to Capt. Waskow's body.

One soldier came and looked down and he said out loud, "Goddammit." That was all he said, and then he walked away. Another one came. He said "Goddammit to hell anyway." He looked down for a few moments, and then he turned and left.

Another man came; I think he was an officer. It was hard to tell officers from men in the half-light, for all were bearded and grimy dirty. The man looked down in to the dead captain's face, and then he spoke directly to him, as though he were alive. He said: "I'm sorry, old man."

Then a soldier came and stood beside the officer, and bent over, and he too spoke to his dead captain, not in a whisper but awfully tenderly, and he said: "I sure am sorry, sir."

Then the first man squatted down, and he reached down and took the dead hand, and he sat there for five full minutes, holding the dead hand in his own and looking intently into the dead face, and he never uttered a sound all the time he sat there.

And then finally he put the hand down, and then reached up and gently straightened the points of the captain's shirt collar, and then he sort of rearranged the tattered edges of his uniform around the wound.

And then he got up and walked away down the road in the moonlight, all alone.



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## Invest in solving the child care crisis

BY KELLY SPARKS AND KATY BROOKS

Central Oregon's dire shortage of child care openings has reached crisis proportions. As far back as 2017, child care operators had waiting lists hundreds of names long. A new report shows conditions worsened across the state during the pandemic, with our region designated a child care "desert." The shortage's effect on our community stretches



Brooks



Sparks

beyond families. Reliable child care provides relief to working and student parents, and supports businesses and community members who count on a dependable workforce. It also supports the future of our youngest residents.

With federal funding available to Central Oregon through the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (or ARPA) to support pandemic relief and economic recovery, we have an opportunity to turn our child care desert into an oasis, creating quality, affordable and scalable child care throughout Central Oregon.

Already, Sen. Tim Knopp has demonstrated leadership on this issue, proposing \$1 million in state ARPA funds to support such an effort. Our hope is that in the coming days, Deschutes County will match that \$1 million commitment through its local ARPA funding.

That funding can support an innovative child care solution that Oregon State University-Cascades,

### GUEST COLUMN

Central Oregon Community College and other community partners have long been working toward. With stable child care contributing to employee retention, the Bend Chamber has been key to this effort. Chamber representatives have met with state and local legislators to ensure the critical need is understood, and raised \$130,000 for a child care accelerator, most notably including support from businesses who have lost talented employees due to the lack of area child care.

Called Little Kits Early Learning & Child Care Center (kits being the young of both beavers and bobcats), this child care solution builds on a successful program piloted at OSU-Cascades in response to the pandemic and the urgent child care needs of student and employee parents.

With COCC as a committed partner we have at hand an opportunity to expand the pilot child care program, initially opening spaces for up to 100 infant-to-pre-K children.

Little Kits can leverage assets of both institutions: our early childhood academic expertise, programs focused on nurturing resilience in children, education programs that give child care staff and early childhood educators opportunities to pursue associate or bachelor's degrees, and students seeking practical experience like internships and apprenticeships in preparation for careers in the early childhood field.

Little Kits can also capitalize on OSU-Cascades' and COCC's shared operations, reducing start-up and overhead costs, and allowing the

center to attract talented staff with pay and benefits they deserve. And while Little Kits will initially serve OSU-Cascades and COCC employee and student parents, as it grows, it will increasingly accommodate other community member parents.

Little Kits can be sited on land available at either or both campuses — a site on OSU-Cascades' expanding campus is designated for such a facility and COCC leaders have identified a potential site — and housed in efficiently constructed modular buildings. It is a model that is planned to be replicated across the region to support our community. Already, Redmond is under consideration as a next location.

Little Kits has the support of additional organizations who are each vested in expanding child care options in the region: Better Together, the City of Bend, East Cascades Works, the High Desert Education Service District and NeighborImpact.

For the first time in nearly five years, we are hopeful for our region's families. Together, we have designed a solution that is backed by the expertise and resources of Central Oregon's higher education institutions, supported by expert community collaborators and that can serve hundreds of local families.

Deschutes County Commissioners can amplify federal ARPA dollars coming into our region to solve a problem that reaches beyond the pandemic into families' everyday lives and the future economic health of our community. We think that's a good return on investment.

■ Kelly Sparks is associate vice president for finance and strategic planning at Oregon State University-Cascades. Katy Brooks is CEO of the Bend Chamber.

### Letters policy

We welcome your letters. Letters should be limited to one issue, contain no more than 250 words and include the writer's signature, phone number and address for verification. We edit letters for brevity, grammar, taste and legal reasons. We reject poetry, personal attacks, form letters, letters submitted elsewhere and those appropriate for other sections of The Bulletin. Writers are limited to one letter or guest column every 30 days.

### Guest columns

Your submissions should be between 550 and 650 words; they must be signed; and they must include the writer's phone number and address for verification. We edit submissions for brevity, grammar, taste and legal reasons. We reject those submitted elsewhere. Locally submitted columns alternate with national columnists and commentaries. Writers are limited to one letter or guest column every 30 days.

### How to submit

Please address your submission to either My Nickel's Worth or Guest Column and mail, fax or email it to The Bulletin. Email submissions are preferred.

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# The military did not acknowledge they were a couple

BY PETULA DVORAK

The Washington Post

Ruthie the black lab knows her mom and dad.

Last month was the first time that Kathleen Bourque took Ruthie to the beach after their whole world changed — after dad didn't come home from Marine Corps training, after the U.S. government packed up all their belongings and shipped them across the country, after she had to insist that she was family, that she belonged right there, next to Conor McDowell's casket at the funeral.

Bourque, 24, was McDowell's fiancée when he was killed in a training mission two years ago. And in her grief, she's also had to fight for what even the dog knew all along — that Kathleen and Conor were a couple.

Their life together was just about perfect. He was 24, handsome, a child of Capitol Hill and Washington, D.C.'s

intellectual class who decided to join the Marines. She was 22, a recent college graduate and looking for a life outside her small North Carolina town.

They had a cute apartment in California, wedding plans, two cats and Ruthie, the floppy puppy who loved running on the beach with them.

McDowell, a troop commander with the 1st Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion, was supposed to pick up the engagement ring he ordered as soon as he got back from a 10-day training mission.

But on May 9, 2019, he was crushed to death when his light armored vehicle rolled over after it fell into a weed-choked abyss at Camp Pendleton near San Diego. He saved his men, warning them and pushing them to safety. But he couldn't save himself.

Bourque didn't learn from the military that her fiancé had died. The

news came from three friends who came to their apartment the next day. She wasn't his wife yet, so she wasn't entitled to an official notification.

Then she couldn't get the government to include her belongings with his when they cleared out their apartment, because she wasn't a wife.

And when the funeral procession began through Arlington National Cemetery, one of the officials asked her to stand back because she wasn't immediate family.

"Excuse me, sir. I am Conor McDowell's fiancée," she said she told him. "I might not have had the chance to take his last name, but I am his family. I am going to walk beside his parents and there is nothing you can do to stop me from doing so."

Bourque went to live with McDowell's parents in Maryland, sleeping in his old bedroom.

And she found other fiancées who

equally struggled with their marginalized roles after a death.

The betrothed don't get invited to Gold Star events or grief groups or to apply for scholarships or programs to help them piece their lives together after they lost everything.

She found other fiancées like her, women who insisted they be called widows. Seven of them formed a group — the Wids — and they gathered for support, visited their loved ones in Arlington en masse, mourned for the weddings and the lives they never had.

In New Jersey, Chelsea Todd wore her wedding dress to visit her fiancé's grave on their planned wedding day — Nov. 20 — after he died of cancer two weeks earlier.

"As time starts to pass, I sit here realizing that it's now my turn to fight," Todd told Connecting Vets after visiting Marine veteran Patrick Duvá's grave. She and Duvá's family believe

his cancer was linked to the burn pits in Afghanistan he was around during his deployment.

Todd joins a gathering movement of lawmakers, families and even Jon Stewart who are urging Congress to recognize the long-term impact of those burn pits.

Bourque drives McDowell's pickup truck, with Ruthie by her side. They went to the beach recently, this time the Atlantic.

As soon as Ruthie smelled the salt air and heard the waves, she began frantically searching, running in circles, sniffing the sand for McDowell's familiar trail.

"Are you looking for Daddy?" Bourque had asked. "She knew. She knew he was always at the beach with her." Even the dog knew they belonged together.

■ Petula Dvorak is a columnist for The Washington Post.