



TRIBUTE TO SERVICE

“Tribute to Service” is an initiative by the editorial and columnist team at the Northern Sentry to honor veterans we’ve encountered or connected with during our journalism careers. We extend our heartfelt thanks to the many local merchants who supported us, as well as to those who graciously shared their stories.

By nature, those who have served this great country often don’t speak about their time defending our freedom. They live quietly among us—as neighbors, friends, or perhaps someone you see at a Scout meeting or PTA event. It is with great pride that we present “Tribute to Service,” recognizing that these are only a few of the countless inspiring stories we could tell.

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Trophy Elk for Air Force Vet

KIM FUNDINGSLAND

Just before sunrise he pulled on his backpack, put an arm through his rifle sling, grabbed a small stool to sit on, and began a half-mile trek down a tree row. Larry Verraneault, 78, Minot, a veteran of 6 years in the Marine Corps , followed by 17 ½ years in the Air Force, remembers each step in the early morning darkness.

“I only have one lung so I was really sucking wind,” said Verraneault. “I sat down just as the sun was beginning to come up. As I looked up I could make out an elk in the middle of the field. He started coming towards me. He must have heard me breathing. I couldn’t believe it.”

Verraneault was still struggling to catch his breath, thinking about his good fortune at drawing a once in a lifetime North Dakota elk tag on only his third try and now, remarkably, a big bull elk was emerging more clearly in the morning light.

“I could tell he was trying to get a whiff of me. I guess his curiosity got him. He stopped and then started coming toward me at a right oblique. He just kept coming and coming,” said Verraneault. “The light was getting better too. I could see he was a 6x6.”

A few minutes later, his breathing having settled down a bit, Verraneault stopped the bull with a single shot. Alone, Verraneault walked over to examine the downed elk. It was then that he realized in his excitement to get into the field, he’d forgotten his license tag.

“I walked all the way back to my truck to get it,” said Verraneault. “I drove back out there and put the license on him and called the

property owner. He came out with his tractor.”

Verraneault made a couple more phone calls and additional help was on the way, including Kellen Lattendrese, Minot, who arrived pulling a flatbed trailer on which to load the large animal. It was a very rewarding time for Verraneault, who was extremely grateful for all the help he received before and after his harvest.

“I tell you what, I was surprised. I want to thank a lot of people who helped me out,” said Verraneault.

Those helpers included a gracious land owner and Kellen Lattendrese’s father, Curt, who helped Verraneault get acquainted with the area on and near the J. Clark Salyer National Wildlife Refuge. The elk was taken on private land northeast of Minot Air Force Base.

“I’m having a shoulder mount done,” said a very happy

Verraneault. “I really appreciate the landowner and all the help.”

Verraneault knows the value of teamwork, something keenly developed during his lengthy military career. He served in the Marines from 1965-71 and then the Airforce from 1971-89, including tours of duty in Viet Nam in 1967-68 as a Marine and in 1972 with the Air Force.

“I was an aircraft mechanic assigned to TAC,” remarked Verraneault. “When you gotta’ go, you gotta’ go.”

Verraneault’s wife died shortly after his retirement. He was living in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina at the time. At his daughter’s insistence, a North Dakota resident, he moved to the state nearly six years ago and has thoroughly enjoyed his opportunities to get outdoors. As Verraneault puts it, “Yes sir. Unbelievable.”



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Prairie doughboy becomes local hero

MARVIN BAKER

In a way, Clarence McCormack’s life was like any other young man on the North Dakota prairie. He worked on the farm as a mechanic three miles south of Donnybrook, the youngest of 10 children, and hoped to get married and have a farm of his own one day.

But a decision in Congress on April 6, 1917, threw a monkey wrench into McCormack’s life and the lives of 4.8 million other Americans who fought in a war “over there.”

That decision was a declaration of war on Germany that sent most of these Americans to France where they ended up in the “War to End All Wars,” which later became known as World War I.

Young men were getting drafted to support the American cause but McCormack enlisted. In fact, he was the first person from Ward County to volunteer to fight in France and he was the first Ward County Soldier to die in the war. He was 22 years old when he died. His brother Irvin also enlisted and his sister Mary joined the Army Nurses Corps.

McCormack enlisted in Minot and wound up with Company K, 16th Infantry Regiment, 1st Infantry Division, eventually taking a fighting position in France, 55 miles northeast of Paris.

McCormack and four other Soldiers were in a trench July 20, 1918 during the Battle of Soissons when a German shell exploded nearly on top of them, killing four of the five including McCormack. The one man who survived, later recalled what had happened.

A 1919 article in the Donnybrook Courier explains the obvious, according to the surviving Soldier.

“On July 20, about 8 o’clock, while we were still assaulting the retreating Prussian guard and German line, a high explosive shell struck among the five of us, and three others unknown to me. I was blown into the air, the bomb striking very close, a foot or so from me, and I was badly wounded in the shoulder and arm and left leg. When I came to, I saw Clarence McCormack, and the three others lying close to me dead. So far as I could see, Clarence was badly wounded and mutilated.”

That explosion would immediately resonate in France and in the United States through a newsreel. This silent form of communication was used often in movie houses to show American progress in the wars and propaganda about the war.

Members of the U.S. Army Signal Corps filmed the near impossible Battle of Soissons. The footage was taken under combat conditions and used as an official film to document American actions during World

War I. Its last known viewing was in a CBS documentary in 1960.

The newsreel from the Battle of Soissons revealed something nobody in Donnybrook, or North Dakota for that matter, wanted to see.

According to Donna Davis, who has knowledge of the McCormack family, wrote a note that appeared on the family tree website Ancestry.com. She stated, “Clarence’s mother Sidney was watching footage of the battle when the death of her son was unfolded in front of her eyes, even before receiving a letter from Washington, D.C., telling of his death.”

No. 1, just imagine the shock and grief of seeing that and No. 2, it’s amazing that a newsreel could survive being that close to a blast that killed four of five Soldiers.

As a result of witnessing the explosion and that another son Irvin returned from the war shell shocked, Sidney wore black dresses for the rest of her life. Following the war, the McCormack family sold their Donnybrook farm and moved to Sand Point, Idaho.

The news of McCormack’s death was graphic enough, but to this day, his body has not been recovered and buried.

According to the organization American War Memorials, McCormack was officially declared killed in action on July 20, 1918, but also declared missing on the third day of the five-day battle of Soissons.

He and 1,060 other American Soldiers who were never recovered from World War I, are memorialized on Tablets of the Missing at the Aisne-Marne American Cemetery in Belleau, France.

The tablets are located inside the memorial chapel bearing the names of all the Americans.

On Aug. 1, 1919, McCormack was posthumously awarded the World War I Victory Medal with a Silver Citation for gallantry in action, an



Born in Annadale, Minn., on April 14, 1896, this is most likely the first photograph to exist of Clarence McCormack.



Pvt. Clarence McCormack stands in front of his tent while training at Jefferson Barracks in St. Louis in May 1917.

award that was replaced by the Silver Star in 1932.

About the same time, McCormack posthumously received a tribute from French President, Raymond Poincare.

On Oct. 1, 1920, the American Legion granted a charter post in Donnybrook that became known as the Clarence McCormack American Legion Post 195.

A myriad of posts were chartered in the early ‘20s most often named after deceased young Soldiers to honor and commemorate their service and sacrifice, especially those from the local community.

And in Donnybrook’s case, it was named after Pfc. Clarence McCormack, who today remains a local hero in Donnybrook, in Ward County, in North Dakota and in the U.S. Army.

Today, the Clarence McCormack post and auxiliary remain active with Memorial Day and Veterans Day programs and burial honors. “Mort pour la France!”



A photo of Clarence McCormack was taken shortly after he arrived in France in 1917.

FIGHTING IN THE WAR TO END ALL WARS

The Battle of Soissons of 1918 was fought on the Western Front between the French with American and British assistance against the German armies. It was part of the much larger Allied offensive called the Aisne-Marne counter-offensive.

The primary objective of the battle was to cut off a road and railroad that were major supply routes for the Germans in the Marne salient. By attacking the routes, the Allies severely impaired the Germans’ ability to supply its armies in that part of France.

The Germans were later forced to retreat and the Battle of Soissons marked the turning point of the war as the Germans would be on the defensive for the remainder of the War that raged nearly four months after the battle.

During the much larger Aisne-Marne counter-offensive, the Allies achieved a major breakthrough, pushing the Germans back across the Marne River. The Allies captured 134,000 prisoners and 187 guns during the offensive’s initial phase.

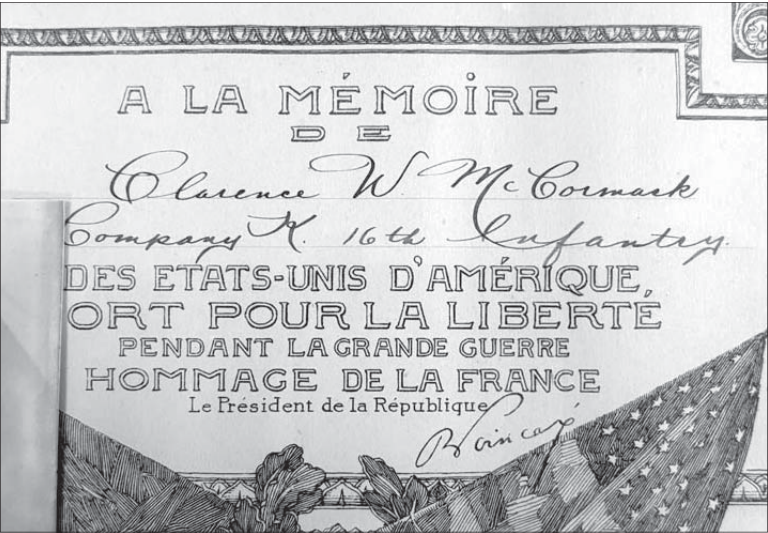
The Aisne-Marne marked the first major successful Allied counter-offensive in the war, swinging the momentum in favor of the Allies.

It boosted morale throughout the Allied forces, especially in France, following a string of German successes.

Two months after the success of the Aisne-Marne, the 16th Infantry was involved in another major battle of World War I, the Meuse-Argonne offensive which was fought from Sept. 26 to Nov. 11, 1918, when an armistice was signed ending the war.



On Aug. 1, 1919, Clarence McCormack posthumously became a member of the Society of the First Division and was awarded the World War I Victory Medal with Silver Citation for gallantry in Action. In 1932, the Silver Citation was replaced by the Silver Star.



A French certificate that hangs in the American Legion hall in Donnybrook states, “In memory of Clarence W. McCormack, Company K, 16th Infantry of the United States of America, who fought for freedom during the Great War. Tribute from France, President of the Republic, Raymond Poincare.”

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Minot Makes Its Mark: Airman Larry Brown

ERIN BEENE

Starting his military career in the late 1900s, Larry Brown knew little about the lifestyle he was stepping into when he enlisted in the U.S. Air Force. He quickly learned what military life was all about when he arrived at his first duty station - Minot Air Force Base - in 1997. Through deployments, hardships, and personal struggles, Larry Brown has become a proud veteran and a dedicated Minot local who loves the city so much he plans to open a large, interactive entertainment facility for kids, teens, and families alike.

Born and raised in New Orleans, Larry served over a decade in the Air Force, facing frequent moves, combat deployments, and a severe injury along the way. Though he looks back on his time in service with pride and gratitude, then Staff Sergeant Brown was ready for a new chapter when he separated in 2009. He explained that at that point, he needed to focus on his family and his health: "I just needed to make sure I stayed alive for my kids. Getting out was what needed to happen at that time."

After his honorable separation, Larry moved to New York City to pursue acting and modeling. While the change of pace was exciting, work came slowly, and before long, he found himself struggling to make ends meet. Out of luck and out of money, he reached out to a contact in Minot who helped him obtain his commercial driver's license (CDL). By 2011, Larry was back in North Dakota, hauling fuel for Flying J and rediscovering a familiar community.

Living and working around Minot, Larry noticed what many residents already knew: there wasn't much for young people to do

for fun. That realization sparked an idea that would change the course of his life.

His vision, now beginning to take shape, is to create a large roller-skating and entertainment center for the community. His dream includes go-karts, food, and "old-school fun" in a family-friendly environment. "There will be no alcohol sales," Larry said, emphasizing that he wants the space to feel safe and welcoming for everyone. He plans to name the venue Masquerades, a nod to his New Orleans roots and its blend of culture, activity, and celebration.

Since 2019, Larry has been working to raise the funds and support needed to bring Masquerades to life. "Even after five years, I still have a thirst to keep things alive," he said. He's collaborated with the Minot Area Chamber EDC, local businesses, and even applied for state grants

to reach the estimated \$1 million required to begin construction.

Progress has been slow, but Larry remains confident. When asked why he chose to build such a project in Minot, he said, "Kids need to be social, and there's nothing for them to do in Minot. This will give people a place to get out, talk, and relax."

Recently, Larry was awaiting approval for a tourism destination grant that could provide the funding needed to begin construction by fall 2026. Unfortunately, that grant did not get approved. However, he is not giving up hope for funding. "I plan to 'boot strap' and go out and find the wealthy citizens of Minot for investments and some of the big corporations."

Hopefully, Minot will soon have a vibrant new space for roller skating, go-karting, and good, old-fashioned fun - a place where kids can simply be kids.

Larry Brown may have started



Larry Brown referees at a 2023 Our Redeemers boys District Basketball game.

as just another Airman stationed at Minot AFB, but his dedication and love for this community have inspired a dream that's sure to leave a lasting mark on the Magic City.



Larry at Nedrose High School promoting Masquerades, his skating rink project, in 2023.



Keesler AFB, 1997, After Larry commanded a "Drill Down" military competition.

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The Civil War Freight Wagon that kept the war at bay

One hero’s story

JEANNE SEXTON-BROWN

Corporal Ernest “Ernie” Hoelscher, 95 is a combat Veteran of the Korean War. He lived through more than many could even imagine in a horror movie. His story is one that makes the statement ‘War is Hell’ seem like a fairy tale.

In about 1974, Ernie and his friend, Lee Vigstol, now deceased, started the restoration of a Civil War Freight Wagon.

“We found it in a wood pile, ready to be burned,” recalled Ernie. “Oh, it was in bad shape.”

Lee and Ernie were part of a Civil War Reenactment group in the Foxholm, ND area. That is what triggered the notion that they should restore the old freight wagon.

Ken Hoelscher, Ernie and Shirley Hoelscher’s second oldest son, remembers them hauling the old wagon home on a trailer. It started to fall off and Ken tried to stop it. Ken was about 14 at the time. He remembers the tongue of the wagon digging into the dirt road.

They found the running gear in Canada. The only two original parts of the wagon are the front and rear bolsters. The wagon was designed to haul 3,000-pound loads. It was pulled by a 12-mule team with the driver being on the back left mule. He drove them by cracking a whip in the air and the mules just knew what to do, according to Ernie.

“We had to send to the National Archives to get the blueprints for the wagon to know how to restore it,” said Ernie. “We had to measure everything just right. The spokes, the metal hubs, everything made to scale. We had to build a big fire to put the metal in. It had to be red hot then put in water to cool and shrink it onto every wheel.”

They went to Minnesota to get the hardwood for the undercarriage. Even the paint job was made according to specs.

“The paint shop had to mix the color we needed,” said Ernie. “The outside is light blue and the inside is red.”

Ernie moved to the North Dakota Veterans Home in January, 2025. His wife of 73 years, Shirley, passed away two years ago.

On Sunday, October 12, Ernie once again saw his Civil War Era Freight Wagon. The wagon was brought to the Veterans Home along with a people mover wagon to give rides to the residents and for Ernie to show his fellow Veterans his wagon.

The Civil War Freight Wagon was on display while residents were given horse drawn wagon rides



Pictured beside the Civil War Era Freight Wagon is Ernie Hoelscher and his family. Back row: up top: Phil Newman, current caretakers of the wagon. Middle row: (l to r) CeCe Hoelscher, Karla Hoelscher, Ken Hoelscher, Ernie Bauer, Kathy Bauer, and Bruce Hoelscher. Front row: (l to r) Marshal Buelow, Great-granddaughter Kollyns Buelow and Ernie Hoelscher.

JEANNE SEXTON-BROWN PHOTOS

around the Veterans Home grounds.

Several members of Ernie’s family were there to share the big day with Ernie and the other residents.

Ernie’s youngest son, Bruce Hoelscher, lives on the family farm in Foxholm. Bruce and one of the neighbors, JoAnne Radmacher arrived shortly after the wagon pulled into the parking lot. Ken and his wife Karla Hoelscher were there from Oakes with their daughter CeCe and her fiancé Marshal Buelow with their daughter, Ernie’s great-granddaughter, Kollyns.

One of Ernie’s grandsons, also named Ernie and his wife Kathy Bauer had been in Fargo for their 23rd wedding anniversary and stopped by to see Ernie and help him celebrate the wagon. They live in Minot. Little Ernie belongs to the Hoelscher’s only daughter, Sherry who passed away shortly after her mother. The oldest Hoelscher son, Wayne lives in Surrey and was not able to make the trip.

The current caretakers of the Civil War Freight Wagon are Phil and Kim Newman, Minot. Newman brought his team of Belgian Draft horses to pull the wagon. Residents and guests were given rides in the people mover wagon. Ernie’s family was given a ride in the Civil War wagon. It was too difficult to get into the wagon or to climb up on the seat in the front for Ernie but he was happy his family was able to ride in it and to have his family in the pictures of him with his restored wagon.

“Doing restoration work on the wagon and later on old 1940 Era tractors is what helped get the war out of my head,” said Ernie.

For Ernie, he was overwhelmed with the fact that his friend, Phil Newman, would bring the wagon all the way to the Veterans Home.

“I just can’t believe it,” Ernie said many times throughout the day. “I can’t believe he would care enough about me to do this for me.”

For Newman it was an honor to be able to thank the man who is so well known and loved in the Minot/Burlington/Foxholm area.

“Everyone knows and loves Ernie,” said Newman. “I am grateful for his service and honored for the times he and I lead parades sitting up on that wagon.”

Editor’s note: Read Corporal Ernest “Ernie” Hoelscher full story in the November 10, Veterans Edition of the Ransom County Gazette.



Phil Newman shaking hands with Ernie.

Saying ‘Thank you’ is so important

Life is still good!

JEANNE SEXTON-BROWN

It is so very important to thank our Veterans. Maybe it is because both of my dad’s were Veterans or maybe it is because I am from the VietNam Era of Veterans and they were treated so appallingly when they returned. Maybe it is because I live in Lisbon with the North Dakota Veterans Home (NDVH) just across the river from my house.

I think Veteran’s sacrifices are way more than they get credit for.

On Sunday I had the privilege of being present at the North Dakota Veterans Home when a friend made it a point to say ‘Thank you for your service’ to Mr. Ernest “Ernie” Hoelscher, Combat Veteran of the Korean War.

My friend loaded up a ‘people mover’ wagon, his team of Don and Duke, Belgian Draft Horses and Ernie’s Civil War Era Freight Wagon to bring them from Minot to Lisbon for one more ride.

My friend is a very busy man. He and his family own and operate Mema’s Meats of Berthold, ND. They take their meats to Farmer’s Markets and around the Western part of the state. They also do many things as a family, such as making taffy. Yes, the old fashion way of pulling taffy to sell during Halloween and Christmas at their Mema’s Meats truck.

Somehow Phil Newman was able to get everything ready for the family to pull taffy while he drove the long rig of a horse trailer, and a pull behind trailer loaded with two wagons.

He drove over four hours to get to Lisbon to be sure Ernie had a chance to see his wagon one more time.

This required the tall congenial cowboy and his wife to load up on Saturday evening for him to pull out on Sunday morning to make that drive to Lisbon. Leaving wife Kim behind to hold down the taffy making fort.

The reward was the look on Ernie’s face when he saw his old wagon.

Remember that I keep telling you the world needs to follow the new commandment Jesus gave us when He started His ministry on earth. ‘Love one another as I have loved you.’ John 13:34 and John 15:12.

Also, we need to be kind. What a kindness was shown on Sunday when that big pickup truck and two trailers rolled into the Veterans Home. It was a sight to behold but the smile on Ernie’s face was second only to the smile on Newman’s face.

Ernie loved seeing the horses as they reminded him of his team of draft horses, Pete and Poncho. It reminded him of all the times he and Newman lead parades while sitting atop that big old Civil War Freight Wagon.

What a great tribute to one of our country’s heroes. Also what an example for Newman’s family and his grandkids to know what their parents and grandparents did for a 95 year old friend who needed to see his wagon, one more time and go on one last ride.

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Combat Veteran Ernest Hoelscher has a story to tell

JEANNE SEXTON-BROWN

Ernest “Ernie” Hoelscher, 95 is a Korean Combat Veteran living at the North Dakota Veterans Home in Lisbon.

Hoelscher served in the Army, 7th Division, 31st Infantry Regiment in Korea for the last 14 and a half months of the war. He was a combat soldier on the front lines.

“All of us seasoned front line combat Veterans were due to invade China, but the war ended the day before we were to go in,” said Ernie.

He arrived in Korea with forty men he trained with. They were sent to an outpost on the front lines. The morning of the third day there were only three of them left alive. One was Ernie.

The Chinese sent about 1,000 troops over the hill to attack their position.

“We threw everything we had at them,” said Ernie. “We hit them with napalm, just about everything there was. In the morning the bodies were two and three deep.”

Ernie said they called in big trucks to haul off the bodies.

“Once we got the bodies loaded,” said Ernie, “we had to climb up on top of the pile and ride up there to the ditch where we threw the bodies in like so much garbage.”

Ernie was there for 14 and a half months. He had three baths the entire time he was there. He never slept in a bed or a cot.

“We were like machines,” said Ernie.

“After a while, I learned if I propped my gun up just right, I could sleep standing up,” said Ernie with a chuckle.

Ernie fired his rifle one night so much he burned the rifling out.

“I went to my commander and told him, ‘I burned up my gun, you have to send me home now.’, Remembered Ernie. “He told me it didn’t work that way. He gave me another gun and sent me back to the front.”

His commander was an Airborne Ranger whose motto was: ‘You don’t run, you stand and fight.’

Ernie took four bullets in the back.

“They poured iodine on it, packed it with gauze and sent me back to battle,” said Ernie. “I spit those bullets up after I got back home.”

On a recent visit to the Veterans Hospital in Fargo, he discovered that he had fluid building up in one of those old wounds, pressing on his lungs making breathing difficult. The fluid they drained had cancer cells in it, according to Ernie.

“I was knocked out four times,” said Ernie. “Big shells came in; one blew me into the air. I came down unconscious. The medic turned me over, got me breathing again and

said, ‘I thought you went to hell that time, Hoelscher’.”

According to Ernie, the Chinese would shell that hill for two and a half hours a day for 20 days straight.

“When it finally stopped your head would hurt,” said Ernie.

“War changes you,” said Hoelscher in a recent interview with the Gazette. “I was married when I went to Korea. But when I came home, I was a different man. My wife, Shirley, just couldn’t get it. After some really hard fights, I told her I was going to get my 22 and go for a walk. Something clicked that time and she ‘got it’. We were married for 73 years.”

Shirley died March 19, 2023. He and Shirley had four children, three boys and a girl. Wayne lives in Surrey, Ken lives in Oakes, Bruce is the youngest and lives on the home farm in rural Berthold. Their daughter Sherry Hoelscher Bauer, died of cancer May 13, 2023, just two months after her mother.

Hoelscher was a farmer in the northwestern part of the state. He had a team of horses that were a cross between Belgian draft horse and quarter horse. They were named Pete and Poncho.

He did a lot of farming with horses ‘back in the day’ according to his friend Phil Newman, rural Minot.

“Ernie was big in a Civil War re-enactment group,” said Newman. “Ernie and another guy, Lee Vigstol worked on restoring the Civil War Era Freight Wagon.”

During his time in the Civil War Re-enactment group, they had a six-horse hitch to put in front of a Napoleon Cannon to pull it. The barrel was 1,250-pound solid brass. There was a rider mounted on the left horse that drove the right horse. Ernie always drove the middle team.

When his wife’s health started failing, he gave the farm to their children. Shirley went into the nursing home in Velva. She was there for 13 months.

Ernie had to fight for his disability

pay for forty years.

“The military lost my records,” said Ernie. “At one point, after writing to Senator Hoven three times, Hoven told me he didn’t want to hear from me again! He was tired of me writing about my disability.”

After the Korean War, no one talked about the damage war does to the mind and soul of a man. Ernie has been open about what he experienced. But the damage takes a toll.

Ernie continued to serve the Veterans Honor Guard until he was 88 years old. He attended over 300 funerals as an Honor Guard. He attended the Honor Flight in April, 2022.

Ernie came from a family of 10 children. He has one sister left.

“My baby brother died of Agent Orange from his time in VietNam,” recalled Ernie. “My oldest brother spent 20 years in the Air Force. Another brother died of cigarettes. The cigarettes took his lungs.”

Ernie moved to the North Dakota Veterans Home in January, 2025.

“When I got here, I asked them if I could have a shot of bourbon if I needed it,” said Ernie. “They told me I could have a shot if I needed it. I can take a shot of bourbon and it puts me to sleep and keeps the war out of my head.”

When Phil Newman brought the Civil War Era Freight Wagon to the North Dakota Veterans Home on Sunday, October 12, Ernie couldn’t stop smiling. He couldn’t believe that anyone would do such a great thing for him.

That day was a bit of a family reunion with his son Bruce Hoelscher and a neighbor, JoAnne Radmacher arriving for the event. Ken and Karla Hoelscher along with their daughter CeCe Hoelscher and her fiancé, Marshal Buelow and their daughter Kollyns Buelow who is Ernie’s great-granddaughter came from Oakes. Grandson Ernie Bauer (Sherry’s son) and his wife Kathy, Minot, were also on hand to see Ernie as his Civil War Wagon arrived at the Veterans Home.



Ernest “Ernie” Hoelscher.

JEANNE SEXTON-BROWN PHOTOS

“These kids have no idea what the Veterans and their families go through,” said Bruce Hoelscher in talking about the ravages of war on the body and mind of soldiers.

Words like ‘Battle Fatigue’ and ‘Shell Shock’ don’t do justice to the

ravages of war. The phrase, ‘War is Hell’ seems much more fitting after hearing Ernie’s story. Corporal Ernest “Ernie” Hoelscher and his family have earned the utmost respect from this nation.

For 25 years, Minot Area Community Foundation has been making an impact because people give of themselves.

On this Veterans Day, we honor those who have given in the greatest way: our veterans. Your service and sacrifice strengthen our nation, support our communities, and help us all grow stronger.



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Corporal Ernest Hoelscher returns the salute to Major Galen Schroder during his Veterans Pinning Ceremony on Monday, October 27 at the North Dakota Veterans Home Chapel.



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Mr. David Richard’s Enduring Mission to Get Things Done

HANNAH WATERS

CMSgt (Ret) David Richard has dedicated the past 30 years of his life to serving his country through his work with the United States Air Force. What began as a young man’s desire to serve during a time of need evolved into a lifelong and deeply meaningful career in the government sector. Over the years, he has held numerous roles across different bases and assignments, each one shaping his leadership, experience, and understanding of the Air Force’s mission.

Mr. Richard’s journey with the Air Force began in June 1989, when he first enlisted. His first duty station was Minot Air Force Base, where he served as a weapons loader. It was during his time at Minot that he began not only a military career but also a lifelong partnership rooted in the Air Force community.

During one of his later assignments, while serving as a First Sergeant, often referred to as a “1st Shirt”, he had the opportunity to meet the Air Force A1 General, Lt General Richard Newton. That conversation changed his life when he mentioned to the general that he wished he could go back to Minot. Just a few days later, he received new orders sending him back to the base where his journey began. He returned to Minot AFB in 2009 and served there until his retirement in 2015 as a Chief Master Sergeant

He shared that his motivation for returning to Minot was rooted in both personal and professional reasons. He wanted to come back as a Master Sergeant with the ability to “fix things” and make a difference in the base community, improving operations and morale wherever possible. Additionally, returning to Minot meant being closer to his wife’s family, offering

a strong sense of home and stability after years of military moves.

Today, Mr. Richard continues his service as a Civilian employee in a General Schedule, or “GS,” position. He currently serves as the Chief of Installation Personnel Readiness (IPR), where he oversees deployment readiness at the base level. His role is essential in ensuring that Airmen are properly trained, equipped, and prepared to deploy when called upon. Managing this responsibility requires extensive coordination, attention to detail, and an understanding of both the operational and personal sides of readiness.

For Mr. Richard, transitioning from active duty to civilian service was not an end to his Air Force career, it was simply a new chapter. He feels that working as a civilian employee allows him to continue serving, just in a different

capacity. He takes pride in still being part of the mission, ensuring that operations run smoothly, and that Airmen have what they need to succeed. In his current role, he continues to uphold the same standards and dedication that guided him throughout his time in uniform. Although he may no longer wear the rank, he still plays a vital role in making sure things get done and that the base maintains its readiness.

Reflecting on his decades of service, Mr. Richard noted how much the Air Force has evolved over time. He observed that many policies and standards seem to come “full circle,” as he put it, noting that trends and changes often repeat themselves. “If you’ve been in long enough, you see things come back,” he said. He believes that as time passes, standards tend to loosen and then tighten again, a natural rhythm in any large organization. “It’s all



CMSgt (Ret) David Richard, his wife Heidi Richard, and Maj Chapa at CMSgt Richards retirement ceremony.

about what we are willing to put up with,” he added, emphasizing the importance of accountability and consistency.

CMSgt (Ret) Richard’s career stands as a testament to dedication, leadership, and an unwavering commitment to the mission of the

U.S. Air Force. From his early days as an enlisted Airman to his current role as a GS Civilian leading personnel readiness, his story reflects the values of service before self and excellence in all he does, principles that continue to guide his work today.

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Airman Richard in Basic Training in 1989.

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William J. Senger

Decorated Pilot, RCAF and USAAF

NANCY HVINDEN

William J. Senger’s story is unique in that he was a decorated pilot both in the Royal Canadian Air Force and in the USAAF. He was born on a farm southwest of Esmond, ND in 1915. His father died in the 1918 influenza epidemic. His mother remarried and the family moved to Harvey where he graduated from high school and worked as a meat cutter and salesman. Not waiting for the United States to enter the war, Senger was one of more than 6,000 United States citizens who went to Canada and joined the RCAF, of these just over 600 were flying overseas by December 7, 1941. Senger enlisted in October 1940 and trained at 1 bases across Canada. California

Technically, Canada wasn’t allowed to recruit US residents because of the Neutrality Act, if they fought for a foreign country, they could lose their US citizenship. Moral conviction to fight Nazism won out for many and they took this risk, seeing it as protecting the United States by helping save Great Britain. By December 8, 1941, the two countries started working on arrangements for the US nationals to transfer to the USAAF. This would take many months to work out so the “Yanks” continued to fly and for the RCAF. By 1944 a pardon had been issued for those that had joined allied militaries.

By December 1941 Senger’s squadron was awaiting overseas orders. On December 1, 1941 Sgt. Pilot Senger was a witness when his buddy Pilot Officer Harold E. Brown of Winnipeg and Jessie Margaret McDougall of Rolla, ND were married. Not long after, the two pilots headed for England as bomber pilots. Brown, being Canadian remained in the RCAF and was KIA, fall 1944, over Germany. His body was recovered after the war. Senger flew for RCAF until fall 1943.

After transfer to the 7th squadron in England, Senger’s first sortie as co-pilot was with Lt. John H. Stickell, an American from IL who had also gone to Canada to fly. Both went on to receive recognition with RCAF and USAAF. Stickell transferred to the USAAF spring of 1943 and died from wounds received on a mission in the Marshall Islands, December 1943. He received the Navy Cross and a destroyer, the USS Stickell was named in his honor.

Among the foreign decorations Senger received were the British

Distinguished Service Order, British Distinguished Flying Cross, British Pathfinder’s Award, 1939-1942 British Campaign Ribbon, British Allied Defense Ribbon, Canadian Service Ribbon, and the American Volunteer Ribbon (Canada). During his service with the RCAF, Captain Senger flew 46 pathfinder combat missions as pilot of Lancaster and Stirling bombers. One example of a news story about his commendations was found in the Windsor Star newspaper, June 13, 1944, page 6 under the title Awards to Americans. By October 1943, Senger had transferred to the USAAF as a Captain, been processed at Santa Monica, California, assigned to Headquarters AAF Training Command and received commission as an instrument pilot with the 8th Air Force. After more training at Selman Field, Alabama, Lockbourne Army Air Base, Ohio and Alamogordo, New Mexico he was assigned to the 61st Squadron of the 39th Bomb Group as an Airplane Commander and leader of “A” Flight, flying a B-29 Superfortress. He led Crew 21 and the name of their plane was City of Pittsfield, or as they had painted on the nosecone “Two Passes and

a Crap.”

Spring 1945 found the crew flying bombing runs over Tokyo from their base in Guam. They had been on the successful raid over Tokyo on April 14, 1945. May 14, 1945 General Curtis Lemay directed 529 B-29s to take off for the daylight incendiary bomb raid of Nagoya. Crew 21, commanded by Captain Senger, along with over 100 planes given the assignment bombing the Mitsubishi airplane motor plant. They were successful in their mission, but flak hit one of the engines.

William J. Senger remained a Captain in the USAAF until 1947. He settled in California, married in 1949 and continued flying as a crop duster, killed in a flying accident in June 1954.

**The B-29 crews were especially fearful of being taken prisoner by the Japanese. Because of the bombing raids, they were called “special prisoners” and treated the worst of all the POWs. Only 5% of US pilot POWs in Japan survived versus 95% of those captured by the Germans.

Visit www.northernsentry.com to find a summary of events as recalled by crew member Victor R Durrance.



Mitsubishi Aircraft Plant Nagoya Mission
COURTESY OF MARVIN DEMANZUK, RADAR OPERATOR, P-02



“Two Passes”
USAAF PHOTO

CREW 21 COMBAT MISSIONS APRIL-JUNE 1945

Date	Target	Flying Hours
12 April 1945	Koriyama	18:40
14 April 1945	Tokyo	15:45
16 April 1945	Kawoski	15:10
21 April 1945	Kushira	15:00
26 April 1945	Kokubu	14:45
28 April 1945	Search Mission	18:15
04 May 1945	Saeki	17:20
11 May 1945	Fukae	17:00
14 May 1945	North Nagoya Urban Area – ditched	17:05
10 June 1945	Tokyo	15:05
18 June 1945	Kagoshima	14:45
Total Combat Flying Hrs		193:50



Rescue Mission

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“It’s A Way To Honor Them”

ROD WILSON, NORTHERN SENTRY

Jeremy and Matt Buller are the owners of ABRA (Auto Body Refinishers of America) in Minot, and from the day they purchased their Minot location, they have worked extra hard to connect not only with Minot, but the Minot Air Force Base.

“We purchased the Minot location in January of 2023, and we have always gone out of our way to welcome veterans and active duty military” according to Jeremy Buller “as our military heritage goes back to the Korean War and their Grandfather Theodore Roll who served there. Add to that their Uncle Larry Buller who served in Vietnam from 1964-1975, and another Uncle, Colonel Darrell Roll who had served in Germany during the Cold War, 1980 to 1984,

Desert Shield in 1990, and finally Iraqi Freedom from 2003 to 2004. “We’re really proud of those in our family who served. It’s a part of who we are” continued Buller.

Veteran’s Day is a special day at ABRA according to Buller, “from 9 AM to 11 AM that morning we serve a complimentary breakfast for veterans, both retired and active duty, in our Minot location. It’s a complete breakfast with eggs, sausage, orange juice and coffee...it’s completely free, and it’s our way of honoring them and thanking them for their service.

But the Veteran’s Day event in Minot is only one part of a complete community approach for ABRA. Outside of providing the community with exceptional service, the Buller brothers do their

part to stay involved and host an annual summer event they call Abra Community Day.

“Each summer, we host our own car show at our Bismarck location as a joint effort with a local church and bank,” said Jeremy Buller. “We hope to create a great community event with all the proceeds going to a local charity of the community’s choosing. In addition to the car show, we have an RC airplane show, a kid’s corner and vendor show.”

The ABRA family includes several veterans including Jeremiah Cramer, a Navy veteran who works in the Minot location. “We really are a family” continues Jeremy “and we hope that we can show appreciation through events like our Veteran’s Day breakfast.



Matt & Jeremy Buller, owners of ABRA in Minot, are proud to serve a Veterans’ Day Breakfast to retired and active duty veterans.



The ABRA Minot location will be hosting a Veteran’s Day breakfast. It is located at 629 20th Ave SE.

VETERANS DAY

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A Veteran’s Journey: Chief Thomas and the Meaning of Service

NATALY ZARRELLA

Long before he earned the title “Chief,” Detrick Thomas was just a kid with a fascination for fighter jets and a dream of becoming a pilot. But what started as a childhood wonder turned into a 26-year journey of leadership, grit, mentorship, and service that would take him across the Air Force and right back to Minot AFB.

Now retired, but far from idle, Chief Master Sergeant (Ret.) Detrick Thomas continues to impact the lives of Airmen, families, and friends in the community he’s proud to call home. This Veterans Day, we celebrate not just his rank, ribbons, or resume but the heart behind the uniform, and the humility that defines a true servant leader.

Detrick Thomas grew up wide-eyed and fascinated by the roar of fighter jets. He dreamed of becoming a pilot or aircraft designer. After an initial detour of missing an ROTC deadline at the University of Nebraska, he pivoted, took the leap, and enlisted in the U.S. Air Force on July 12, 1995. What started as a practical decision to use education benefits quickly turned into a passion-fueled career.

Thomas’s first assignment was right here at Minot AFB, arriving in December of 1995 to the 91st Maintenance Group. He spent over a decade here before heading to Keesler AFB in Mississippi as an NCO Academy Instructor, a fitting role for a leader who would go on to shape generations of Airmen. In 2012, Minot called him back, and he stayed until he retired in September 2021.

His final role? None other than Chief Enlisted Manager for the 705th Munitions Squadron, overseeing the operations of over 280 personnel responsible for the

care and custody of cruise missiles and reentry systems supporting two strategic wings. If that sounds intense it was. But Thomas handled it with the calm of a seasoned pro and the heart of a mentor.



Chief Dietrich Thomas, who served the majority of his career with the 705th Munitions Squadron at Minot AFB.

When the uniform came off, the name “Chief” didn’t. Transitioning to civilian life was a bit disorienting for him, especially as he moved directly to Ramstein, Germany as a dependent spouse. “It was weird hearing people call me by my first name, I felt like my name was always Chief or Sergeant.”

Still, he embraced the new chapter, diving into life as a full-time parent, car enthusiast, and wingman to his wife Chief Master Sergeant Becky S. Thomas, who currently serves as the Command Chief Master Sergeant for Air Force Global Strike Command’s 91st Missile Wing at Minot Air Force Base. While he’s no longer in uniform fixing missiles, he’s still in the game, mentoring, supporting

the base, and staying involved with Minot’s Chief’s Group and Key Support Liaison program.

Thomas doesn’t just talk about “service”, he lives it. He keeps in touch with fellow veterans across the globe, organizing reunions, stopping in to visit former colleagues, and continuing to support the military community.

In 2023, he helped put together a reunion for Airmen stationed at Minot AFB back in the late ’90s and early 2000s. “Some I hadn’t seen in 15 years, but it felt like we had just seen each other last week,” he said. “That bond never goes away.”

For Thomas, Veterans Day isn’t about parades and pats on the back, it’s about reflection and respect.

He thinks about his parents, both long-serving Army veterans, and he honors his great-grandparents who were both WWII vets, and whose strength shaped him, even if their stories weren’t fully told. “I regret not learning more about what they went through,” he said, “but I’m incredibly proud of their service, especially given the challenges of that era.”

He believes this day set aside to honor past military members is special and needed. “It lets us slow down and truly appreciate what our servicemembers and their families have done.”

If there’s one lesson Thomas would pass on to the next generation, it’s this: “Take ownership and put your all in whatever you’re assigned to do in order to put the best product/service out there”. Be the kind of person who would proudly “put their name on the mailbox”, as former CMSAF #5 Bob Gaylor used to say. In other words, stand by your work, because when you take pride in what you do, everyone benefits.



Retired Chief Thomas, who served 26 years of honorable service, left his footprint at Minot AFB.

“It makes your unit better, your branch stronger, and ultimately, our country stronger.”

Whether he’s under a car hood, in a classroom mentoring young Airmen, or standing quietly at a local Veterans Day ceremony, Chief Thomas shows us that service doesn’t end at retirement, it just shifts gears.

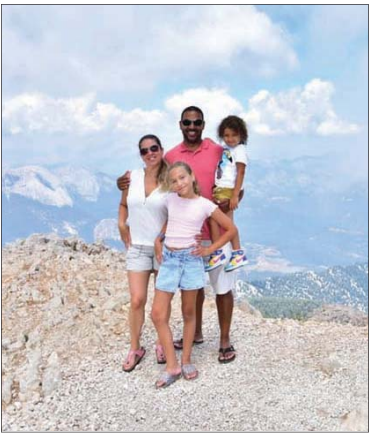
Because while he may not seek the spotlight or call himself a hero, his legacy of service, leadership, and quiet strength speaks for itself, not just here in Minot, but across the Air Force family and beyond.

Thank you for your service, Chief Thomas. Your leadership, humility, and dedication continue to inspire those who follow in your footsteps.

To all veterans, past and present, thank you for your service.



Retired Chief during his time as a MSgt at Minot AFB, standing with our nation’s strategic nuclear assets.



Retired Chief Detrick Thomas and Chief Becky Thomas with their two youngest kids who are now enjoying being at Minot AFB while he enjoys retirement.

A graphic for Veterans Day featuring a large American flag at the top. Below it is a silhouette of a soldier in full combat gear, including a helmet and a rifle. The text "11th NOVEMBER" is in red, "VETERANS DAY" is in large blue letters, and "Honoring All Who Served" is in red script. At the bottom, it says "Serving the Minot Air Force Base" and features the "Enerbase Cooperative resources." logo.

A graphic with a large American flag at the top. Below it, the text "Thank You Veteran's" is written in a large, blue, cursive font. Underneath, it says "HONORING ALL WHO SERVED" in blue capital letters. At the bottom, there is a logo for "ROOSEVELT PARK ZOO" featuring a tiger's head, and the address "1219 BURDICK EXPY EAST MINOT, ND" and website "www.RPZoo.com • 701-857-4166".

A large banner for Veterans Day with a background of white stars on a blue field and red and white stripes. The text "VETERANS DAY" is in large, bold, blue letters, and "HONORING ALL WHO SERVED" is in blue capital letters below it. On the left is the "Rick's Jewelry" logo, which features a large diamond. On the right is a dark blue box with white text that says "PROUD TO SUPPORT OUR MILITARY WITH A 10% MILITARY DISCOUNT!".

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