

Veterans Day

NOVEMBER 11, 2023

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FARRAGUTPRESS WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 8, 2023 • 1D

Army veteran Balint recalls his service

Building bridges and a Bronze Star for heroism are among the highlights

TAMMY CHEEK

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Korean and Vietnam War veteran Joseph "Joe" Balint, 93, of Farragut built bridges, piloted planes and saw other action during his years in the military.

And was awarded a Bronze Star for heroism.

"He's an amazing testament to the American Spirit," his wife, Margo, described him.

Joe's service to his country was inspired by his brother, George, who served in World War II.

"I remember listening to the radio (in a small mining town in Macanaua, Pennsylvania) when Pearl Harbor (attack) took place," Joe said.

Then 11 years old, "I couldn't wait until I was 17 years old to enlist in the Army or Navy.

"I chose the Army, eventually," he added. "We were all very patriotic."

When George got drafted in 1944, "that inspired me to go into the Army," Joe recalled. "The war was still going on, and he was stationed down in Fort Polk, Louisiana."

Joe was not old enough until 1946, when he turned 17, to join the Army.

"I had to convince my mother so she'd let me go," Joe recalled and laughed. "She didn't want to let me go."

Although World War II had ended a year prior, he said, "if you went into service before a

certain date, you were considered World War II 'Army of Occupation' if you're overseas."

About the Army, Joe said he liked the "security of it all and the opportunity for advancement."

Joe went to Japan in 1947, where troops still occupied that country.

"I was with an engineer map company, and I was a company clerk," he said, a private first class then a corporal.

In 1950, he attended the Officer Candidate School.

"I was in recruiting duty in New York City at the headquarters at 39 Whitehall St.," Joe said. "I was a sergeant then, and I decided I would like to become an officer and stay in the service."

That same year, the Korean War was just beginning and would continue until 1953.

After completing OCS in Fort Riley, Kansas, Joe was promoted to second lieutenant, went to engineer school in Fort Belvoir, Virginia, and then to Korea in 1951.

Once he arrived, Joe was designated a platoon leader with B Company, 14th Combat Engineers, with which he build roads, pontoon bridges, de-activated landmines set all over South Korea and "did everything," he said.

Looking back, Joe said Korea was "the coldest place on Earth" in the winter.

While he recalled seeing action, Joe noted, "the type of

action I saw was from the engineer point. We built bridges across the Imjin River for example."

Joe later went to Fort Drum, New York, where he served as executive officer for the Army's Engineer Construction Company. Then, in 1953, he attended flight school at Gary Air Force Base, Texas, where he learned to fly several types of aircraft then finished his flight training at Fort Sill, Oklahoma. That same year, he was assigned to the 937th Aviation Company in Panama and Tequigalpa, Honduras, where he received a Medal of Merit from the Honduran president, recognizing Joe for his air relief assistance during a flood disaster.

In 1957, then a captain, Joe attended a helicopter course at Fort Walters, Texas, and was subsequently assigned to the Presidio in San Francisco. He left there in 1959 to join the Topographical Team in Tehran, Iran, was promoted to major and was part of the team mapping out areas around the world.

While flying mapping missions in 1961, Joe "encountered mechanical difficulties" and had to make an emergency landing in the desert. After a "may day" call, he was rescued by the Iranian National Guard on camels.

After returning to the United States in 1965, Joe was stationed at Lakehurst Naval



Photo submitted

Joseph Balint, kneeling left, joined his fellow engineer soldiers for a photo while he was serving in Korea.

Air Station in New Jersey, South Vietnam, the following year, when he was assigned to the First Calvary Division, B Company, 229th Assault Helicopter Battalion, flying Huey helicopters and ferrying troops and ammunition.

In 1966, he was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross during an aerial flight and was promoted to lieutenant colonel.

"It was in a place called

LZ Hammond (north of Qui Nhon)," Joe said, recalling a specific call to duty there. "We were playing pinochle and finished."

"I was going to get ready for bed, and then all of a sudden, they were requesting (air) support to bring ammunition to infantry units," he said.

Joe volunteered.

"They needed a pilot, and I was just Peter Pilot at the

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Foundation raises funds for Army Aviator Gold Star Families

Spencer "Smokey" Payne, an East Tennessee native, is leveraging his apparel and accessories company - Brotallion - to help raise funds for Army Aviator Gold Star Families.

Founded by Payne and fellow Army Aviators Brett Kroll and Kyle Kilroy, the Brotallion Blue Skies Foundation seeks to support the families of fallen aviators through the sale of unique memorial products, specifically designed for each mishap.

Payne said the Brotallion team works closely with the foundation throughout this process to design a personalized logo that pays tribute to the aircrew member and their unit.

"This logo is carefully crafted to capture the essence and honor the memory of those who have made the ultimate sacrifice," he said.

Brotallion then creates a

variety of tangible memorial products, such as T-shirts, hats and patches, based on the approved design. All profits generated from these items are donated to the Blue Skies Foundation before being granted to the aviator's family.

"This financial support directly contributes to the Foundation's mission of providing assistance and support to Gold Star families who have lost a loved one in Army Aviation mishaps," he said. "Once the funds have been raised through the sale of memorial apparel, they are subsequently granted to the affected families. This financial assistance helps the families in their time of need."

Currently, 95% of the money raised directly benefits Gold Star families. However, in addition to providing financial assistance, Payne said the Blue Skies Foundation is also aimed at ensuring "the lega-

cies of those who have made the ultimate sacrifice will live on."

"It is our mission to honor and support our fellow Army Aviators and their families during their times of need," he said.

In fact, Payne said the Blue Skies Foundation was established as a response to an aviation mishap that took the life of Maj. Trevor Joseph, a Tennessee native and graduate of the University of Tennessee, on Sept. 26, 2019, in Fort Polk, La.

"This heartbreaking event served as a catalyst for us," he explained. "The very next day, we decided to leverage our influence in the community through Brotallion to make a difference."

Since its inception, the Blue Skies Foundation has granted more than \$278,000 to 29 Gold Star families, including the organization's first recipient - Erin Joseph, who received more than \$13,000 from the sale of Brotallion's "Cajun Dustoff" memorial shirts.

"Brotallion's journey is not



just a business venture; it's a testament to the power of passion, dedication, and the desire to make a meaningful impact," said Payne, noting that the company has donated over \$140,000 to the organization's efforts to date. "At Brotallion, we believe that our success is tied to the well-being of the communities that we serve, primarily that of the Army Aviation community."

Payne, who attended Knox-

ville Catholic High School, was appointed to the United States Merchant Marine Academy in 2009 and was commissioned in 2013, after earning a bachelor's degree in marine engineering. Following a decade-long career as an Army Aviator, he decided to return to his home and pursue an MBA at the University of Tennessee in late 2020.

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Balint

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time,” Joe said.

The award’s citation reads he volunteered for a mission to “resupply ammunition to troops on the ground who were surrounded by Viet Cong.” That award was later followed by his receiving the Bronze Star for heroism.

Although never injured during his service, Joe suffered from the effects of Agent Orange.

He retired from the Army in 1969 and was later employed with Bristol Helicopter Company of London, which was based in Tehran, until 1978.

Upon returning to the United States, Joe continues to fly aircraft for commercial



companies until 1984, when he went into banking. He was named vice president of Corporate Services for the City Federal Bank in Florida, where Joe met Margo, who was a personal assistant to the bank’s president.

After a bout with COVID in 2021, he suffered kidney failure because of his experience with Agent Orange, along with many years dealing with diabetes and heart disease.

Yet, Margo describes Joe as “the Energizer bunny.”

Brotallion

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“Although I’m currently living in Dallas, Texas, East Tennessee holds a special place in my heart, and I’ll always consider it my home,” he said. “Go Vols!”

Now serving as Brotallion’s CEO and the Blue Skies Foundation’s executive director, Payne is committed to spearheading new ways to support the families of fallen aviators. One of the newest initiatives, he said, is a scholarship program geared toward children left behind by Army aviation mishaps.

“This initiative not only honors the memory of the fallen Army Aviators but also provides practical support to

the families they leave behind, helping to ensure a brighter future through education for their children,” he said. “The goal is to reach a fund size of \$100,000 to be in a position to provide significant distributions to support the educational aspirations of these deserving young individuals.”

Anyone interested in joining the Blue Skies Foundation in its mission of supporting veteran families is encouraged to follow the organization on social media (@blue_skies_foundation) to stay updated about any upcoming fundraisers and events. Donations can also be made directly through the website at thebrotallionblueskiesfoundation.org.

~ Rachel Totten



David Hayes FROM MILKMAN TO ENTREPRENEUR

Mrs. Hayes was supposed to be off duty the day she met her son. She was a nurse at Knox County Child and Family Services when one day, a 19-year-old woman arrived cradling a young baby, just a few weeks old. The woman said she wasn’t going to be able to keep him and wanted to put him up for adoption. Mrs. Hayes interviewed the woman and told her to take the baby back home for a few days before letting them know for sure that this is what she wanted to do. Four days later, she confirmed that she wanted to give the baby up for adoption. In the end, Mrs. Hayes would personally adopt him.

That baby was David Hayes, owner of David’s Abbey Carpet & Floors. I sit with him in our office conference room as he tells me his story.

“I could not have been adopted by a better family,” he says. “We were not rich in money but rich in love.”

David explains that, when he first went to school, kids would talk about him being adopted. “Well, I didn’t know what that was,” David says. “I went home and told my parents, and they sat me down and explained to me exactly what it was...” They said that if he ever wanted to know about his birth mother, “the adoption papers are in the cedar chest in the bedroom.”

David didn’t look into this until he was an adult. One day, he was listening to the radio while driving and heard the story of a reunion of an adoptee with his birth parents. This sparked a curiosity in David, and on Thanksgiving, he asked his adopted parents, and they gave him all the information and papers they had.

“From that, I became obsessed with trying to find the birth mother,” David says, “for the purpose of telling her, ‘Thank you for giving me life.’”

Unfortunately, tracking down adoption records was a lot more difficult than it is now. He would search for years.

It was during this time that David founded his business. I ask him about it, and he reclines in his chair, smiles, and says, “In real life, I’m a milkman.”

Indeed, David was hired straight out of high school by Mayfield Dairy where he worked for 11 years. He served as a milkman then a supervisor, but he wanted to be a salesman. Unfortunately, his boss said that he needed a college degree, and with a wife and three kids, David just didn’t have time to go to college, nor did he believe he was meant to. Nevertheless, David was anxious to sell, so he started his own part-time side-business out of his basement, calling it Hayes Carpet.

He explains, “When I built a house in 1970, I had a friend of mine I bought carpet from, and I started moonlighting with him... We started in January 21 of 1973, and we went to the Atlanta market, and we found us a supplier or two that would sell to us, and we went from there.”

Strangely, many of the suppliers seemed suspicious of them and turned them down. David wasn’t sure why until one day when he got a call from a sales tax guy asking if he was connected to the former Hayes Carpet company on Clinton highway. David said he wasn’t.

“Then you might want to change your name,” the man said. “The former Hayes Carpet closed up for non-payment of taxes.”

Suddenly, David understood why the suppliers had been so suspicious. He quickly changed the company name to David’s Carpet Sales.

For a few months, he worked both jobs— Mayfield and his carpet company. Then, in September, his branch manager told him he had to decide if he wanted to be in the carpet business or the milk business. Now, David had been working since 4 in the morning and it was now 5 in the afternoon with another hour worth of work remaining, so this didn’t sit well with him, and he promptly turned in his notice.

“Don’t do that,” the manager said. “You need to think about this.”

“I did,” David responded. “You told me I needed to make a decision, and I made one.”

After finishing his last hour of work, David loaded up his truck and started home when suddenly it hit him—he was going to have to tell his wife, Judy, now pregnant with their fourth child, that he had quit his job to run his carpet business despite having no money and no business education.

He spent the drive working up his courage before walking in and telling her what had happened.

“I’m working my notice, and in 30 days, we’ll be full time in the carpet business,” he said.

Judy was silent for a moment before, supportive as always, she said, “That’s okay. We’ll make it.”

There were times when it was difficult. David recalled, “When I would go to Georgia to purchase carpet, I would write checks that I did not have money in the bank for, but I made sure I covered each check before they would clear the bank. I never bounced a check, thanks to the bank manager, but some days it was close!”

A few years later, David learned that Knoxville was scheduled to host an upcoming World’s Fair. He did a six month study of where most of his business was coming from and decided he needed a store in West Knoxville. At first, they were doing well, but then several clients ended up not paying their bills, and he lost hundreds of thousands in a time where he didn’t have any money. He went to the bank for a \$60,000 loan, but they turned him down, so David left, unsure how he could remain in business.

The next day, he was visited by one of the bank officers who he’d gone to school with.

The officer asked, “David, if the bank makes you this loan, do you think you’ll make it?”

“I think I’ll make it,” David said, “but if I don’t, you’ll be paid someday.”

“That’s all I need to know,” the officer said. A few hours later, David got a call approving the loan.

As David tells this story, my boss, the owner says, “It’s not easy being in business, is it?”

“No, it’s not easy,” David agrees, “but there again, the Lord put someone in front of me who could help me, and it worked. And life’s not been easy for 50 years, but it’s been good. My goal in business is to do what’s right. Sometimes it makes no sense to do what’s right financially, but you do what’s right, and it pays off.”

Fifty years after its founding, David’s Abbey & Carpet is running strong, and David has built an incredible legacy for his children.

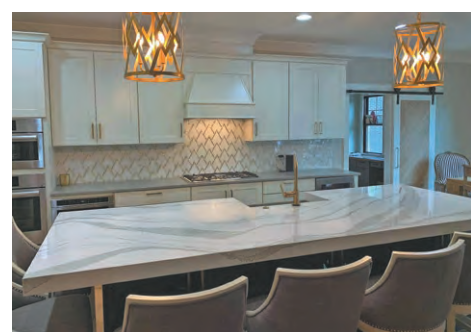
A Christian, David sums up his journey by saying, “The Lord has blessed us all the way through this whole thing.” Even when David makes mistakes, God has seen him through. “It’s only by the grace of God,” he says.

Meanwhile, David was still searching for his birth mother. He became involved in a movement called Roots which connected adopted people and birth parents. This group was involved in getting the laws changed to make it easier for people to access their adoption records. Through this, David was able to find his birth mother living just two blocks from his now-adult daughters.

“She never would let me meet with her,” David says of his birth mother. “She told me, ‘I don’t have anything to say. You say whatever you want to, and that’s the best I can do.’ And so, every Mother’s Day after that, for as long as she was alive, I sent her cards—I sent her non-invasive cards—but I respected what she did.” She gave him life, and for that, he is forever grateful.

When she died, David only learned about it by reading it in the newspaper. Though they’d never met, he attended the funeral, where only a single person knew who he was. In the eulogy, the pastor talked about how sad it was that she had desperately wanted a child but could never have any. No one knew that her only son was sitting there among them.

A week after the funeral, David contacted his birth mother’s sister who couldn’t believe she had a nephew she’d never known about. After confirming David’s identity, she invited him to drive out to Georgia to meet the family. As he pulled into their driveway, he saw decorations and yellow ribbons tied all over the trees and sixteen brand-new family members excitedly waiting to meet him—a family reunion.



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