

Ed Komandosky's Transcript

Ed Komandosky, a retired army colonel, was among the five speakers presenting oral histories at the first "Deep in the Heart of Taylor" story night at Taylor's Moody Museum, October 13, 2018.

So my introduction for Ed is going to be kind of short. So I came up to Ed earlier today and I asked him, I was like, "Is there any" -- "any key callouts you want me to go ahead and say?" And he gave me a laundry list of things and I was like, "Okay, let's just go ahead and keep it short."

So we're going to go ahead and give this title to him for -- just in case you don't know, he is a retired colonel, which I think makes him more than capable of telling the story, telling Taylor folk -- I mean, Taylor folks in uniform, which is a story about the men and women who served in the U.S. military from the early days of Taylor to today.

All right. Come on, Ed.

Let me put a postscript to Janetta's story -- and Buzz knows this story, too -- that LBJ did come to Jimmy's funeral. I was fortunate enough to be serving as editor down at the Taylor Press back in those days and the funeral was at the only funeral home we really had here at that time, Condra Funeral Home, and I hid in the bushes beside the funeral parlor because the police had blocked off all the roads. You couldn't -- you know, LBJ, I mean, even as past president he had a lot of security. So I kind of hid in the bushes back there and as he got out of the car to come up the main walkway I did snap his picture, and it's somewhere in the press archives, I think. But he and the Dellingers were very good friends.

As you might suspect, after Taylor was founded in 1876 several of the folks around town -- and I ascribe to the old theory that we find in the constitution that people who carry guns were supposed to be part of the organized militia. The Supreme Court doesn't agree with me, but that's their prerogative.

Anyway, about a couple of years after the founding of Taylor a group got together known as -- they called themselves the Taylor Rifles, and they were the forerunners of the National Guard company that was founded here later on and the predecessors are still -- is that the correct word, "predecessors"? I don't know -- are still in operation here. We've had a National Guard unit here in Taylor, in other words, from about the turn of the 20th century.

Well, one of the more interesting things about the Taylor Rifles -- and you can see there is a stained-glass window that Jerry Frankeny redid that's in the -- it's now called the United Christian Church at the corner of 6th and Talbot. It was the First Christian Church and then they merged with another church. And in one of those stained-glass windows you'll find the name Taylor Rifles and it tells who donated it. I'm not -- I don't remember the name of

who donated it. But the most interesting member of the Taylor Rifles was a guy named Booth. You may recognize that name.

Mendel Booth, as he was called, was one of the founders of the old Taylor National Bank. His family was very prominent. There's a Booth Street in Taylor. There's a big house out on Lake Drive that he built. But everybody called him Cap Booth because he was the Taylor Rifles captain. Captain Booth. Everybody called him -- in town called him Cap Booth.

Cap was an interesting character because while he was president of the bank, he would take the train to Dallas to the bankers convention, but he had a propensity to spend a lot of money that he didn't intend to at night. And so he took just a small amount of money with him and every morning the guy who was left in charge of the bank down here would get a telegram from him saying, "Send me another hundred dollars." And that went on for a week or so, you know.

But anyway, Cap was an interesting guy. He was very disappointed though, because when the militia was called up for the Spanish-American War, much to his disgust, the Taylor unit was not called up and the Georgetown unit was and he was just furious and I tend to think that was the cause of the rivalry between Taylor and Georgetown that exists to this day. I'm probably wrong about that, but it makes a damn good story.

Well, following the Spanish-American War things kind of settled down a little bit. I imagine the militia guys -- they were also known not only for their marksmanship, but they had great social activities. And we'll just leave it at that.

World War II [sic] did not involve the United States until 1917. President Woodrow Wilson tried like heck to make sure the Americans didn't get involved in that war, but eventually had to and several prominent people from Taylor -- and I'll mention some names as we go along -- participated in that war, among them were the Luhn brothers.

Many of you may remember the Luhn & Johns Drugstore that used to be at the corner of -- what is that -- 3rd and Main. Russell Luhn was a pharmacist there. His brother Graham Luhn was involved in the war, as were a couple of other of their brothers, and Graham was killed in the war. And after the war, about 1919, various veterans of World War I organized the American Legion and the local post was named for Graham Luhn and to this day out in Murphy Park you will find the American Legion hall has a plaque on it in honor of Graham Luhn.

Another member -- or the very first commander of the American Legion post out there in Murphy Park was none other than our own Dan Moody, whose house we now sit in. He was the first commander. Now, he did not go to the war. He tried to enlist, as I understand, but because he was the only son of a widow they wouldn't take him in the regular Army. So that's when he joined the National Guard and he stayed in the National Guard for a couple of years and later on

resigned his commission because he got busy being a district and county attorney.

Following World War I, in the late 1920s into the 1930s, Taylor, along with every other community in the country, suffered from the Great Depression and everybody was worried about making a living and not so much about what we were doing overseas. But while we were worried about -- or we -- the folks in Taylor and all over the country were worried about making a living, the folks in Europe had their own problems and eventually war broke out there in 1939.

Well, there were a number of people here in Taylor -- and I'll mention some more names that many of you may be familiar with -- who participated, obviously, in World War II. The country went from a standing Army of about 160,000 men -- just imagine that now, 160,000 -- to by the end of the war there were over 8 million Americans in uniform.

Now, this is where I tip my hat to the ladies, because many, many, of those were women who participated, not only in uniform, but especially taking their husband's and brother's and father's place on the defense assembly lines -- that's where Rosie the Riveter got her name and so on -- and became pretty famous in their own way.

But let me mention a couple of names from Taylor here that you'll remember, or know. Joe Stiborik. Joe was a sergeant in the Army Air Corps and was the assistant navigator, I think was his correct title, in World War II and he was the assistant navigator on the Enola Gay, which dropped the first atomic bomb. So that's an interesting thing.

Another one was Erwin Teggeman. Many of you may remember Mr. Teggeman. He was actually captured and was a prisoner of war for many years and later became president of the State 36th Division Association. That was the type of unit that the National Guard evolved into, was the 36th Infantry Division. By the way, still in existence, headquartered over in Austin.

There were others that you may remember, Ross Wilder was in the Army Air Corps. He flew with Doolittle in his first raid into -- or over Japan.

I don't know if you'll remember, there's a guy named Sidney Pierce. Sidney Pierce turned out to be the first person from Taylor who died in World War II and the VFW post is named for him. His brother Phil Pierce is still living in Austin and occasionally visits over here to the Moody Museum.

Lots of stories about World War II, but let me tell you one that I think would focus your attention just a bit and that's on a guy named John Brunner. Anybody recognize that name? He was the postmaster in Taylor. And back in those days when you got a telegram from the Army, or the military, it wasn't good news and John Brunner had to deliver those telegrams and he did it whether it was in the day, at night, on the weekend. He would personally take those notifications of death to the families personally, and he did that in both World War I and II.

After World War II everybody again hoped that was the last time we'd see military action, but it was not to be. There followed the Korean War. There were members who -- from Taylor who participated in that. Then we had the Vietnam War. It's interesting that most of the official government documentation does not refer to Korea or Vietnam, or even the issues in Iraq and Afghanistan, really as official wars. They're conflicts, they're offensive actions, they're police actions, anything but the word "war."

But among those who served in Vietnam that you may be familiar with were Benny Macook. I think some of you may know Benny. Chuck Nallan who was a helicopter pilot, got shot down, was a guest speaker here a couple of times ago. My brother and I both served in Vietnam, and a guy named Jerry Kidwell, who many of you may not know, but is the current commander of the VFW.

Then we have the Gulf War, Afghanistan -- Buzz? I didn't know that, Buzz. Oh, I see. It's not the belly he's showing me. It's the belt buckle.

Those who served in Afghanistan or Iraq that are still around and you can visit with include Nathan Davis. Anybody know Nathan? He's the current general manager down at Condra Funeral Home. Joe Meller. Joe Meller is a past commander of the VFW. And Scott Dean, who is the current commander of the American Legion.

So all of these people served. I think what we need to remember is Taylor and its citizens never shirked their responsibility when it came to defending their country. And I'm sure Buzz and I would have stories to tell you about the people who drafted us. I know that's how I got there. You know, it wasn't by choice, but when my time got called I went and I'm sure there were a lot of others who did the same thing.

So I think we need to remember that the citizens of Taylor are also good citizens of the United States.