

Around Town D

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Thursday, May 23, 2013

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Death at sea A Memorial Day remembrance

by Mark Millican

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(Ed. note: The following story is drawn from the author's 1996 book, *Wild, But True, Stories of the Outdoors and other Southernalia*, that is currently out of print.)

It had been a successful field op.

Our tactical objective had been achieved, my squad of U.S. Marine engineers had cross-trained with our Italian counterparts learning each others' explosives and weapons systems, and then the night before debarking for our Navy ship we capped it off by sitting around a campfire talking about the next liberty port on a six-month Mediterranean cruise.

Little did we know the tragedy the next day would bring.

The morning in March 1979 came early, and as usual there was a "hurry-up-and-wait" phase that's endemic to military service. An incident seemed to mark the day to come. Our platoon sergeant from North Carolina — who'd become a friend — had scavenged around and requisitioned an extra case of C-rations for my squad. I guess the waiting had put me in a bad mood, and instead of thanking him I exploded and told him not to worry about my squad, I could very well take care of them myself.

In amazement he just shook his head and walked away with the C-rats, and immediately I felt like a jerk.

But the day was just beginning to sour. Our escort to the beach finally arrived. They were the feared Italian police, the Carabinieri, who

were known to come tearing up to a fight scene in their dark blue Fiats in a place like Naples and jump out with Uzi submachine guns strapped over their shoulders. Things got real

See Death page 3D



U.S. Marine Cpl. Mark Millican's squad of combat engineers built a portable landing pad for the Harrier "jump jet" during field operations in Norway in October 1980. Several Marine and Navy pilots died trying to learn to fly the aircraft, which lifts off vertically with two fore and two aft thrusters that rotate 90 degrees to the rear for forward flight.

Dancing into my heart

Last Saturday, our granddaughter Kennedy had her

spring recital with the Atlanta Ballet Company that she has been training with the past several months.

The recital was at 10 a.m. at the Perst Performing Arts Center on the Georgia Tech campus. That's a long way from Ellijay, especially at that hour of the morning.

We decided to spend the night at our daughter Amy's in Vinings the night before to make it easier to get to the recital on time. That was a wise decision.

There were several groups of ballerinas who performed before Kennedy's class. Some of them were probably five or six and some of them were either stage struck or scared. One little girl sucked on her fingers the entire routine, ignoring what her classmates were doing, and then ran off stage.

No such problem with Kennedy. She performed flawlessly with her group. As the girls trotted off stage left, she blew kisses to the audience getting added applause. Ever the ham, she was the only one to do that.

After pictures outside with the ballerinas, it was time for lunch. Kennedy chose the Old Highland Bakery because they had chocolate croissants as our destination.

We had a long wait because I think everyone in Atlanta also had decided to go there for lunch.

During the wait, Kennedy brought up spending a sleepover with us. It's been a few months since she has stayed with us.

She has been campaigning for a two-night stay but asked for three nights. However, that quickly expanded to five nights. I told her we didn't have enough bubble bath for that many nights. Ever having an answer, she replied, "We can go get some more."

I told her that if she was going to stay that long, we might as well pack up all her stuff and just have her move in with us. She was fine with that idea. Her parents not so much.

Finally seated, we pored over the menu. I had decided on eggs Benedict. Potatoes or grits were the side dish options. Kennedy said I wanted grits because she said she would share them with me.

I was in the rest room when the waitress took the orders and Kennedy ordered for me and elected to have cheese added to the grits.

Grandma wasn't sure about that but agreed with Kennedy's parents that whatever Kennedy wanted, I would go along with it. They were right.

The eggs Benedict and grits were wonderful.

When we returned to our cars, Kennedy quickly climbed into the back seat, ready to go home with us. Because we were tired from not much sleep in a strange bed and having several stops on the way home, we convinced her that a sleepover would be forthcoming very soon. She's out of school this week and we have all summer to have her come and stay with us.

The only question now is for how many days and nights. Two, three, five? We'll see.



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Clear Creek seventh-grader awarded



Photos by Whitney Crouch

Local student Danielle Weaver came to the rescue of her mother, Brenda Weaver, when she choked on a piece of food Thursday May 2. Using back blows, Danielle managed to dislodge the obstruction and her mother began to breathe again. In recognition of the Clear Creek Middle School seventh-grader's life-saving actions, Sheriff Stacy Nicholson presented her with an Award of Merit Tuesday, May 14. Danielle is pictured above with law enforcement and school officials. Shown from left to right are Nicholson, Jason Richards, Deputy James "Slugger" Strawbridge, Julie Chancey, Danielle, Kelly Smith, Capt. Mike Gobble, Chief Deputy Randy Moore and Principal Jason Kouns.



Marine with Ellijay ties promoted



Contributed photo

Matthew Neisler is promoted to the rank of Lance Corporal, E-3, while stationed at the Camp Hanson Marine base in Okinawa, Japan. LCPL Neisler is with I Battery, 3 Battalion, 11 Marine Division. The division is based out of the USMC Base at 29 Palms, Calif., when not deployed. LCPL Neisler is the son of Tina Neisler of Ellijay.

A Vietnam vet remembers

by Mark Millican

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Larry Jewell downplays his role in Vietnam, explaining that as a member of the U.S. Army's 709th Maintenance Battalion he didn't see much combat.

But he did see death up close.

"Some of our guys got killed when a couple of mortars hit our barracks," the Ellijay resident said in the week leading up to Memorial Day 2013. "They were upstairs and I was downstairs."

Jewell said his unit supplied troops on the front lines with "all the materials they needed," including food and ammo and other provisions, but there was still an underlying tension in being close to combat zones.

"It's hard to stop a mortar because you don't know where it's going to hit," the West Virginia native said of the deadly armament. "It can happen anytime, even during the night. We were awakened and had to go down to our bunkers as soon as possible so that nobody else got hurt. It was a mortar attack and we had to stay down there until it was over. You would think something like that wouldn't happen since you weren't on the

(front) line, but it does."

Jewell said he didn't recall being accosted by people displaying anti-war sentiments at the airport or in public upon his return from Vietnam to his duty station in Washington State. Instead, he cited the brutality of the enemy.

"I know there were people who didn't want us to go over there (and said things), but the Viet Cong

See Vet page 3D



Photo by Mark Millican

Larry Jewell was a member of the U.S. Army's 709th Maintenance Battalion and is proud of his service in Vietnam 45 years ago.