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Photos, cutlines and columns

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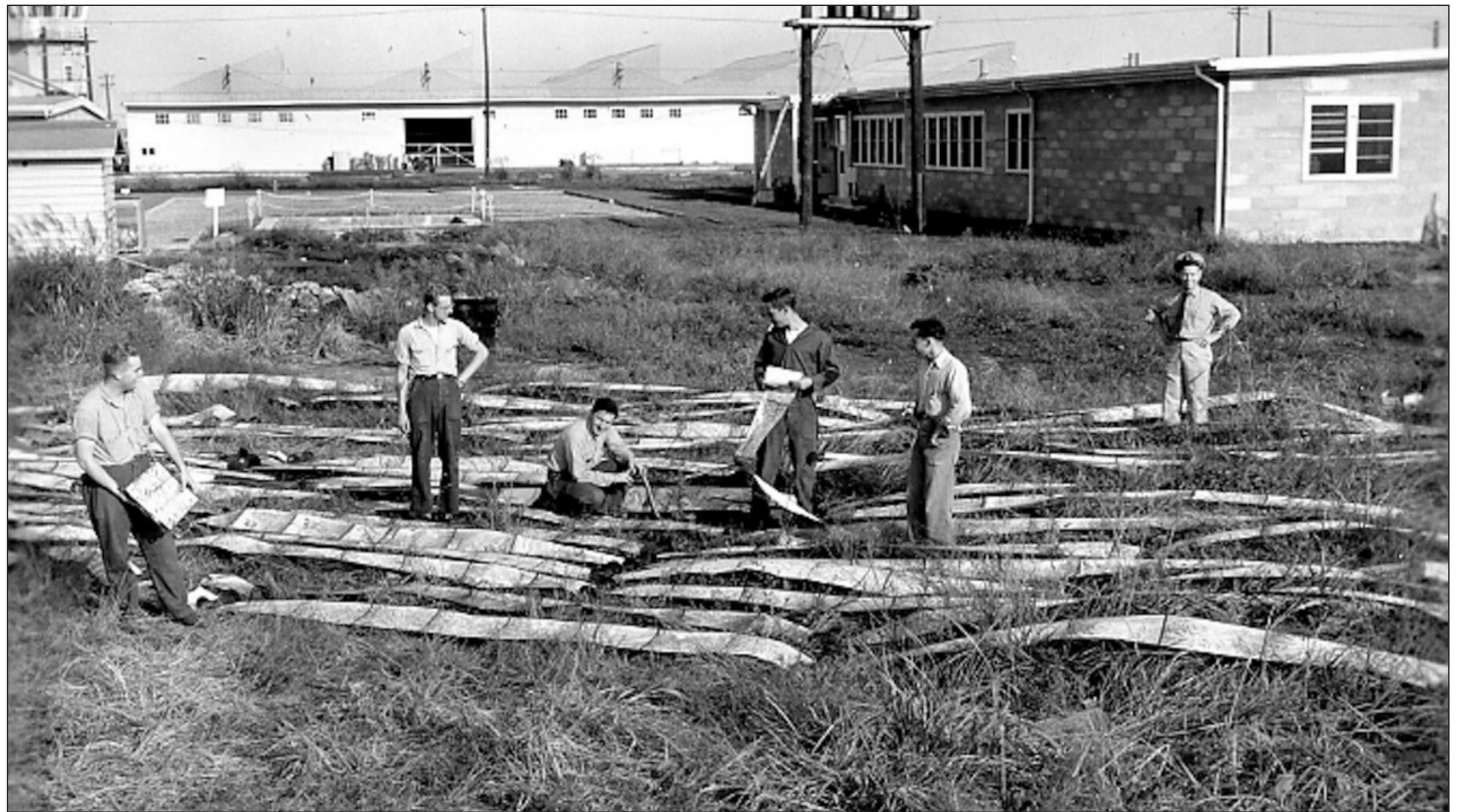
By JOHN KUBAL
The Brookings Register

BROOKINGS — In the annals of South Dakota newspapers is a Brookings man who got a feel for the trade via a tour in the United States Navy as an aerial photographer: And at 92, lifetime South Dakotan and now Brookings resident Chuck Cecil can still turn out a good story. And his own life's story is worth telling.

It began in Wessington Springs, where he was born in 1932. He moved to Sturgis in 1939 and then to Rapid City in 1941. He graduated from high school there in 1950, with no immediate plan for the future.

"I worked odd jobs after graduation," Cecil recalls. "I wasn't sure what I wanted to do. I got a job on the bull gang at the cement plant. During the year, they kept all the weird jobs, the hard jobs, the boring dirty jobs up to this group of young guys, about 10 of us. Cleaning out concrete bins filled with cement that you see when you go by.

"I was in a pickup on a June morning in 1950. This pickup had all the guys of the bull gang in it going to work early in the morning. The radio was on and the broadcast came on about the Korean War starting. I didn't know where Korea was and didn't really pay much attention to it.



Courtesy photo

Chuck Cecil, who would go on to own several South Dakota newspapers and author several books, got his start as an aerial photographer in the United States Navy. Above, film is laid out to dry following a power failure at Atsuge.

"About 9 months later I got a call from the Air Force recruiter in Rapid City saying I was up for the draft and I should enlist in the Air Force. The next day I went down and enlisted in the Navy for four years. I was 19 at the time and thought I might as well see the world,

as they say." Seeing the world started in a small way.

"I got my first train ride from Rapid City to Omaha," he noted. "I was inducted into the service." That was followed with another train ride to San Diego for basic training. Laughing he recalled his

company got set back a month in training because they couldn't march well enough.

Two years in Japan

Cecil had no idea what he wanted to do once "he got out there in the fleet."

See **CECIL**, page 14

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Two memorable days in 'Nam

Retired Brookings physician
spent year in-country

By JOHN KUBAL
The Brookings Register

BROOKINGS — October 1968, South Vietnam. “I got there in the afternoon about 4 (o’clock) or so. Sgt. Phillips came over and said, ‘You Capt. Tesch?’ I said, ‘Yeh, I am.’ They went to what Army Capt. Ronold R. Tesch, a medical officer, called ‘a dirty old Jeep.’ The sergeant gave the captain a flak jacket and a helmet. After an affirmative answer to Phillips that he could shoot, Tesch was given a rifle and two clips and told, “Get in. We’ve got to get home before dark. We wound up at a camp called Bearcat, about halfway between Vung Tau and Saigon.”

Such was the beginning of one year in-country Vietnam for the now-retired ophthalmologist who spent most of his professional life — 44 years — in



Ronold Tesch

Brookings. When he looks back on those days in ‘Nam, two days remain memorable.

Tesch, a native of Pierce, Nebraska, grew up and graduated from high school there in 1958. Next stop was Nebraska

Wesleyan University, where he completed his pre-med requirements before going to University of Nebraska Medical School (Omaha) and graduating with an M.D. in 1967. Following that came an internship in a small suburb of Detroit called Grosse Pointe.

“In med school things were looking like going in the Army, regardless,” Tesch said. “So I signed up for what was called the Berry Plan (“ ... a Vietnam War-era program that allowed physicians to defer obligatory military service until they had completed medical school and residency training.” Wikipedia), but I signed up for the Air Force. So halfway through my internship, I got a ‘Dear John’ letter from the Air Force saying we oversubscribed on docs, so you will be going into the Army.”

In September 1968, I spent six weeks at Fort Sam (Houston) in San Antonio, Texas. About two weeks later, I wound up at Bien Hoa Air Force Base in Vietnam,

close to Saigon.

He would work with Sgt. Phillips “a great guy” and with ‘three, great medics.” “We were a diversive group. Those were the guys I worked with; they were good, good guys.” This was October 1968 and they were assigned to “Bearcat,” where Tesch was a field surgeon. Bearcat was an artillery post with 155mm howitzers: three batteries with six guns each. Two were always out in the jungle providing fire support.

Two months later would come the most memorable two days of his tour of duty.

On Christmas Day, Tesch was on a helicopter with four other soldiers. They were flown somewhere near the Cambodian border and dropped off in a grass field.

“We had no weapons,” Tesch recalls. “We each had a May Day transmitter that we could press if it really got ugly. They dropped us off and took off.

See **TESCH**, page 15



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To the top of the ladder

New Brookings resident re-tired Command Master Chief.

By JOHN KUBAL
The Brookings Register

BROOKINGS — While he didn't run away to a life at sea in boy's adventure-story style, Aaron "Scott" Graham did join the United States Navy at 17 years old. He would serve on active duty for 27 years, moving up the ranks: from Seaman Recruit to Command Master Chief Petty Officer, the highest rank an enlisted sailor can achieve. On the military pay-grade scale, he began active duty at E-1 and retired at E-9.

Following retirement from the Navy in February 2006, Graham would pursue a second career in civilian life, working in a federal civil service position until his second — and final — retirement. Then "looking for a slower pace of life," he and his family moved to Brookings.

Graham was born in Reno, Nevada, on Aug. 15, 1961, "smack-dab in the middle of two sisters, one 3 years younger, one 3 years older." His parents were Allan and Alyce Graham. His father was Canadian.

"He immigrated to the United States," Graham notes. "He joined the United States Air Force; became an American citizen; and met and married my mom." Following his military service, his father worked on the Grand Coulee Dam for the Federal Bureau of Reclamation.

"We didn't stay in Reno very long," he added. "I basically grew up, from my earliest childhood memories, in a little town in eastern Washington called Grand Coulee."

He attended Lake Roosevelt High School, home of the "Lake Roosevelt Raiders." The school was named after the lake that was created by the construction of the Grand Coulee Dam.

Graham had a plan laid out for his life following graduation: "Graduating high school, my goal was to go to college, graduate and become a high school teacher."

At 17, he graduated from Lake Roosevelt H.S.



Courtesy photo

At 17 years old, Navy veteran Scott Graham joined the Navy as a seaman recruit. He would retire 27 years later as a Command Master Chief Petty Officer, the highest rank an enlisted sailor can achieve.

Minority Enlistment

However, he soon realized that at the time he didn't have the money to pursue his goal. Decision time: "So why don't I go and look at maybe joining the service, get a little experience, save a little money and kind of get my bearings and come back and do this the right way."

Since he was 17, his "minority enlistment" required parental approval; he would serve on active duty until the day before his 21st birthday.

In July 1979 he went to basic training in San Diego. Upon graduation he stayed in San Diego and attended A (basic) school and became a sonar technician. (SONAR is an acronym that means Sound Navigation and Ranging. It is used primarily by surface vessels and submarines to find other submarines under water.)

Following school, Graham was

ordered to USS Fletcher (DD-992), a new destroyer which was under construction in Pascagoula, Mississippi. He again remained in San Diego in a pre-commissioning detachment: "I did more schools, firefighting, all the things that they wanted you to have qualifications on before you actually took possession of the ship."

It was nine months to a year before he went to Pascagoula to board Fletcher.

Following the ship's commissioning in June 1980, the crew took Fletcher to San Diego, doing a sort-of "shakedown" cruise en route.

Graham explained that following the Vietnam War, much of which the Navy fought with World War II-vintage vessels, came a concerted effort to modernize the fleet, which he aptly described as "getting pretty long in the tooth."

"The Spruance-class destroyers replaced a lot of the old World War II-era

ships and those later-on destroyers were gas turbine propulsion vice steam," he explained. Additional modern technology came in engineering, electronics and sonar systems.

"I had a really, really good tour aboard Fletcher," Graham said. "I figured out this whole Navy thing is a pretty good gig. You got trained, you got to go to sea, you got to see a lot of different stuff. Of course it was hard; nothing good is easy."

Re-up for six and for life

As his minority enlistment neared its end, Graham was again thinking school: "Get out, go back to college, get my degree and become a teacher." But? "You don't have to rush this; so I decided to stick around and I reenlisted."

Graham, now a sonar system operator,

See **GRAHAM**, page 5

GRAHAM: Highest rank an enlisted sailor can achieve

Continued from page 4

wanted to attend a C school that would qualify him as a technician and able to repair sonar-system equipment. However, before the C school came a B school to learn basic electronics and electricity. Both schools were in San Diego.

Graham was now a petty officer second class (STG2). Following completion of C school, he was ordered to USS Arkansas (CGN-41), a nuclear-powered guided missile cruiser, home-ported in Alameda, California. He had again been promoted: to petty petty officer first class (STG-1).

He would serve 4½ years on Arkansas and make three or four WESTPAC (Western Pacific) cruises.

Along the way in his Navy career, Graham had married while stationed on Fletcher. He had met Tammy Simpson on a double date and “it was basically love at first sight. We got engaged pretty early on.” However, they would date for about 2½ years before marrying.

Following his tour on Arkansas, he was assigned to shore duty at Mare Island, California, as an instructor in fire control systems. While there, in September 1987 — definitely on a fast track — he was promoted to chief petty officer, after only 7½ years on active duty: “Every time I tested for advancement, I got selected,” Graham explained. “Of course that slowed down a bit after I made chief petty officer.”

In 1990 he would leave shore duty to go back to sea aboard USS Valley Forge (CG-50) a conventional cruiser home-ported in San Diego. He would serve there until mid-1994, when he would do one final tour of shore duty at Fleet Technical Support Center Pacific. While there, he would earn a bachelor of science degree from Southern Illinois University (Carbondale) in May 1997 and be promoted to senior chief petty officer that same year. In July he would return to Valley Forge as leading chief petty officer in the Weapons Department. He would also qualify as officer-of-the-deck (underway).



Courtesy photo

Scott Graham spent more than 15 years at sea during 27 years of active duty.

Graham would be selected for master chief petty officer, the Navy’s highest enlisted rank, in 2001. He was handpicked by Captain Phil Wisecup, commander Destroyer Squadron (DESRON) 21 to serve on his staff as Command MCPO. He would stay in that assignment until going aboard USS Denver (LPD-9) as Command MCPO in January 2003, his final tour of duty before retirement in 2006. Graham had served for 27 years of active duty, with 15 ½ years at sea, making about 12 deployments.

His military awards include: Navy-Marine Corps Commendation Medal; Navy-Marine Corps Achievement Medal (four awards); Navy Good Conduct Medal (five awards); Navy Efficiency-Battle “E” Award (five awards); National Defense Medal; Kuwait Liberation Medal; and Southwest Asia Campaign Medal.

Retirement twice, then South Dakota

Following retirement from the Navy, Graham worked for General Dynamics for five years as a contractor doing “reconstruction and analysis of units doing their workups prior to deployment.”

Then General Dynamics, in a cost-saving move, had some contractor positions converted to federal service positions. He was rehired in a federal position.

Graham retired from federal service in August 2022.

Now he was looking “for a slower pace

of life. Southern California was anything but slow. I was longing for the days of my childhood. I just need this non-hectic pace of life. I wanted to come back to a small town, a rural community.”

He made a list of pros and cons and his list came down to South Dakota and to Idaho where an older sister and her family lived.

“But South Dakota kept coming up high on the list as a place to retire to. I was kind of torn. They were about even, South Dakota maybe a little bit ahead. But I know nobody here. Maybe I should just pray on this.”

He did. Laughing, he noted that South Dakota was the place to go. But why Brookings?

“My son (Travis) was still in college at the other SDSU — San Diego State University — and had just finished his junior year. Now we need to find a place for you to finish your degree (in psychology)” SDSU in Brookings became that place. The Graham family moved to Brookings in August 2022. As for a place to call home, he and Tammy decided on new construction.

“We’d never had a brand-new house,” Scott, 63, said.

The Grahams have three children: a married daughter, her husband and four children live in Brookings; their oldest son and his wife live in Irvine, California; and their youngest son, is in his final year at the SDSU that has a Jackrabbit as a mascot.



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By **JOHN KUBAL**
The Brookings Register

BROOKINGS — Growing up and raised in Security, Colorado, Donna Goodwin was part of an extended community dedicated to the security of the United States. “It’s a huge military town,” she explained, “You have Fort Carson, NORAD (North American Air Defense Command), Air Force Academy and Peterson Air Force Base.” She would pursue a career dedicated to that security.

Goodwin attended and graduated from Widefield High School in May 1973, “right in the middle of the women’s liberation movement.”

“There were a lot of military dependents in that high school, so I was around them all the time,” she recalled. “My father had been in the Army in World War II. He was medically discharged, to his dislike, so he never got to go overseas. Never really got to do much of anything other than training.

“I had a cousin who was in the Air Force and that looked pretty good to me.” As to women’s lib? Laughing, she pointed out that she “never has been, never will be” part of that movement.

“Do I believe that women can do anything that they want to, within reason?” Goodwin asked. “At that time I probably believed women could do anything they wanted to. With older age I’ve learned that’s not so true. I’ve learned there are physical limitations to what we can do.

“So when I first enlisted, (for six years) in February 1974, I wanted to go into administration. I knew right off the bat that I wanted to make it a career.” However, while in six-weeks of basic training at Lackland Air Force Base, San Antonio, the ASVAB (Armed Services Vocational Battery) tests showed her better suited for “mechanical.” She was



Courtesy photo

Donna Goodwin went from the Air Force to the Colorado Air National Guard on active status full time.

assigned to a tech school to learn “corrosion control, a glorified name for an aircraft painter.”

Goodwin’s first post-training assignment took her to Tyndall AFB, just east of Panama City, Florida: “I worked on stripping and painting, all that good

stuff, equipment and fighter jets.” Next came Andersen AFB Guam, an assignment she loved.

She worked on C-130 cargo planes. While there she had some temporary duty assignments that took her to Air Force bases at Taiwan, the Philippines,

Japan, and Okinawa, where she attended leadership school. Now a staff sergeant, she was transferred to the Washington, D.C., area.

While she was in that assignment, her mother became ill. She requested

See **GOODWIN**, page 7

GOODWIN: Brookings for 7 years

Continued from page 6

a humanitarian reassignment: "They turned me down because they had just shipped me from Guam to D.C. They gave me a permissive reassignment to (F.E. Warren AFB) Cheyenne, Wyoming. So now I'm working missile silos. I didn't like working missile solos. I didn't like being 50 feet underground."

Goodwin's job didn't involve working on the missiles themselves but on the upkeep and the preservation of the cylinder holding the missiles and the equipment surrounding the missiles.

While she was in Cheyenne, her six-year enlistment ended.

Air Force to the Air Guard

With active duty behind her, Goodwin joined the Colorado Air National Guard in an AGR (Active Guard and Reserve), full-time status, and stayed until retire-

ment, serving in a variety of assignments. She called the AGR a sort-of "best kept secret. ... You have all the benefits of active duty; you get to stay in your state and not go anywhere. It's the best of all worlds." She would retire as a master sergeant in 1998 after 25 ½ years of total service.

"They put me in admin in a mobile radar unit," she said of that first one. "Then there was an admin position open for an assistant to a commander in a small flying unit. Out of several hundred people who wanted it I got it." She added that the unit commander was impressed with her work and she was designated a flight engineer for a military version of a twin-engine Boeing 737-200.

"There were only two units anywhere in the country that had that," Goodwin explained. "One was an active duty unit in Sacramento at Mather AFB and then us. We had four planes. Two were config-

ured with navigational trainers and we were in direct support of the Air Force Navigational Training Program.

"We'd fly down to Colorado Springs, pick up the cadets. They'd navigate us to wherever their instructors had picked to go. We'd go to that base. The cadets would get a tour of that base. They'd navigate back."

Two of the four planes were reconfigured for carrying passengers: "We flew a lot of different places. We flew band members, a lot of governors, a few congressmen and senators. We flew in and out of Central America a lot. That was in the late 1980s, early 1990s." The addition of an extra fuel tank allowed each plane longer range, such as non-stop from California to Hawaii and to Europe via a landing in Iceland.

Before retirement, Goodwin gave up her flight status and became a unit trainer, coordinating the training of flight

mechanics.

In retirement she admitted that she "bounced around a lot." Again laughing, she added, "I couldn't find a home in civilian life." She went on to variety of jobs: training roles with a teleconferencing company, with a telephone company and with an Internet data center.

"Then 9/11 happened and I ended up unemployed for a year," Goodwin said. "And then I ended up working for an insurance company in their claims department.

Now fully retired, she has lived in Brookings for about the past seven years.

"I ended up in South Dakota because my daughter came to SDSU, fell in love with Brookings, fell in love with South Dakota and fell in love with a young man who grew up in Brookings and she refused to come home," Goodwin explained. "She's my only living relative, so here I am."

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Go-to guys for benefits

Two combat veterans man the Brookings County VSO office.

By JOHN KUBAL
The Brookings Register

BROOKINGS — If you're a long-time resident or a newcomer to Brookings County, have served in the armed forces and you possess a very important piece of paper called a DD-214, there's an office in the Brookings City & County Government Center you need to know about: the Veterans Service Office. There to serve you are Veterans Service Officer Matt Pillar and Veterans Service Assistant Rusty Brandsrud. Both men served in the South Dakota Army National Guard and are combat veterans.

Pillar, 37, joined the 153rd Engineer Battalion, Detachment 1, in De Smet right after high school graduation in 2005. He deployed to Afghanistan in 2009 for a year's deployment. He left the Guard in 2013.

"I bounced around a little bit, moved from place to place," he said. "I was a rehab therapist for awhile doing occupational therapy in the nursing homes. I ended up getting a part-time job as the Lake County Veterans Service Officer for Lake County in Madison."

In March 2022, Pillar came to Brookings County as full-time Veterans Service Assistant. In August 2024 he moved up to the post of Brookings County Veterans Service Officer. So far just more than three years he has worked



Courtesy photo

Rusty Brandsrud, left, and Matt Pillar on deployment in Afghanistan.

in Veterans Service assignments.

He's also a 2013 graduate of Lake Area Technical Institute with a degree as an occupational therapy assistant. "I've worked in mental health, post-acute rehabilitation, geriatrics in nursing homes and in pediatrics with kids," Pillar explained. For about eight years I was doing that.

"When COVID hit, fewer people were putting their loved ones in the nursing homes. In therapy, if we didn't have patients to have one-on-one time with, we went home for the day.

"It worked out real nice that I could supplement that job with the part-time veterans service job. Then it came to a crossroads. What would I rather do? I

had to pick one. Splitting them down the middle wasn't a viable option either."

VA an ever-changing system

He took the VSO job in Brookings "and everything fell into place real nice." He continues to live in Lake Preston and commutes to Brookings. On the job here,



See **VSO**, page 11

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VSO: If in doubt, vets should check them out

Continued from page 10

he sees his mission in simple terms: " ... to get each individual veteran any benefits that they are entitled to and to make as many veterans aware of the programs and benefits that are available for them ... and for their friends and family members who are also veterans.

"The number one and two comments I get are: I just had no idea any of this was available or I wish I had done this years ago. We're trying to cut down on the number of times we hear those comments."

Pillar and Brandsrud do community outreach events, getting out a few times a month in front of groups of people to talk about what they do and keep veterans up to date.

"It's an ever-changing system, the VA," Pillar explained. "It's always moving parts and updates and changes. It's tough enough doing it for a living to keep on top of all the things that are always changing. And it's our responsibility as we navigate the process to keep the veterans in our community informed of what's going on, too.

"A lot of times people were told they weren't eligible, couldn't apply for something and now they can. There's something there for almost everybody. I just need to get them in my office and do some digging. I can usually find something."

At 17, Brandsrud joined the 153rd Engineer Battalion, Company B, Det 1, De Smet, as a junior in high school in February 2000. He went to Army basic training following his junior year. Following high school graduation, he

completed Advanced Infantry Training.

He attended college at Minnesota West Community & Technical College (Worthington) for a year. In summer 2002, he took a job in Brookings. He worked there until Dec. 1, 2003. when he went on active duty. First came a stop at a mobilization station in Fort Carson, Colorado. In February 2004 he was "boots on the ground in Iraq."

"We landed in Kuwait for a week or two," he added. "We upgraded some of our vehicles and then rolled into Iraq. We returned back to South Dakota on March 1, 2005."

"Four years later (in 2009 and 2010), I went with Matt overseas to Afghanistan," Brandsrud said. "We were in different platoons but in the same company and were at separate camps." But they did meet each other occasionally in the course of their duties.

"It was like seeing family you hadn't seen for awhile. We'd come into contact with each other. We had missions where we both did route clearance and command wire sweeps up and down the mountains and we would meet each other on the road. It was a process of clearing that route so we could safely get from point A to point B."

He joined Pillar in the Brookings County office in August 2024.

Establish a paper trail

One key question a VSO must answer is: To get veterans benefits as a member of the National Guard is there a requirement for some full-time active duty?

"In most cases, federal active duty

is what the VA recognizes for benefits purposes," Pillar explained. "In 2019 the law changed where the VA will consider claims for hearing loss and tinnitus for National Guard members, even for Guard members that were on drilling status one weekend a month, two weeks a year. They're still exposed to hazardous levels of noise."

Guard units exposed to those hazardous levels would include: combat engineers, transportation and artillery.

Pillar noted that if there is "an accident or an injury when a soldier or airman is on drill status, it is imperative that they get those things documented with their unit so they can start that paper trail. Without a paper trail ... if it isn't written down it never happened.

"We see it all the time; it makes our job a lot more difficult if there's no paper trail. Not all is lost. There are still some options, but it makes the likelihood of a favorable outcome much more unlikely. And it requires a lot more work on that veteran's end, to start gathering evidence after the fact."

All the above being said, step number one is to go to a county VSO. And a veteran's ticket to any and all benefits is a DD-214: Certificate of Release or Discharge from Active Duty. A DD-214 "is needed to verify military service for benefits, retirement, employment and membership in veterans organizations."

"We can get the ball rolling with a DD-214," Pillar explained. "Each claim is unique. It may require different things. At that initial meeting we might not be able to get a claim off that day. There might be

some other evidence gathering involved.

"But at the very minimum we can do 'an intent to file.' That tells the VA we are intending on filing a claim; we don't need to tell them what conditions we're claiming. But there is going to be a claim; we need more time to gather medical evidence or other relevant information to give us the best shot at having a favorable outcome.

"And then we have a year from the intent to file, to formalize that claim. Any benefits granted would be backdated to the date of the intent."

One issue and challenge tied to the veterans community is PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder). "It's never going to go away," Pillar explained. "You can never get rid of it. The best you can do is manage it. That's where the VA comes in." The VSO then noted something every veteran should know.

"Every veteran, regardless of discharge status — meaning honorable, dishonorable, other than honorable, under honorable conditions, bad conduct, doesn't matter. If you served in the military and you are having an acute mental crisis, you can present at any emergency room, declare that you're a veteran and the VA will cover the care for that crisis. Very important that people know that."

Brandsrud offered some "one-liner" words of advice for all veterans: "We've a lot here. We don't know what we don't know. Are you a veteran? What's a veteran in South Dakota? If in doubt, come and check us out."

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He's telling the Army's story

Pvt. Thompson's duty: two years in the D.C. area.

By JOHN KUBAL
The Brookings Register

BROOKINGS — Brookings resident Harrison C. "Harry" Thompson is a man with a sense of adventure (and humor) who likes to be doing something and likes what he's doing at the time. That's pretty much the story of his life to date.

He was born in 1943 at Fort Gordon, near Augusta, Georgia. His father, Harry Thompson Sr., was in the Army, working as a surveyor and would later serve in the Pacific Theater helping build some of the airstrips from which American aircraft would bomb Japan to near total destruction, ending with the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945. With the end of the war and demobilization, he returned to surveying.

Following his birth, Thompson and his mother, Cleo (Nelson) Thompson had moved to North Augusta, South Carolina, and stayed until the war was over. His parents divorced shortly after the war ended. Harry, an only child, was 4 years old at the time. His mother was from northern Minnesota and had attended school at the University of North Dakota (Grand Forks) where Harry would also attend.

Cleo Nelson was a member of Phi Beta Phi Sorority, which had built a settlement school in Gatlinburg, Tennessee. She went there to teach. It was there she met Harry's father. She was gone from the time Harry was about 4 or 5 years old until he graduated from high school. He would be raised by his maternal grandparents in Crookston, Minnesota. But he maintained ties with his father's family.

"I had a really good experience with my grandparents," Harry said. "They kind of spoiled me. I was kind of their fifth child. Cleo, my mother, was the oldest. Uncle Bud was in World War II. Aunt Evilyn an was number three and



Courtesy photo

Army veteran Harry Thompson developed a love for flying. The plane shown here, fitted with pontoons for takeoffs and landing on water, such as this lake, was one of several he owned over the years. The octogenarian still holds his pilot's license.

then Marilyn came along kind of late.

"She was kind of like my big sister. She was 12 years older than me." When Marilyn was in high school she didn't appreciate Harry's hanging around when boys dating her came to call.

"For awhile Marilyn despised me," Harry said, with amusement and a hint of a smile. "But we kept track of each other. She's 94." Over the years after she was widowed she'd visit Harry here in

Brookings. She loved airplane rides in his 1941 North American AT6A trainer. Harry described her as "a character." She now lives in the Reno, Nevada, area. **Knocking about; back to Crookston; drafted**

Thompson graduated from high school in 1961. He worked on an oil pipeline in North Dakota until spring 1963. Then a best friend talked him

into coming to the University of North Dakota.

"I didn't know anything about what was going on," Thompson admitted. "But some of my friends were in this fraternity, Sigma Nu. Carl (a friend) said we'll get you a room at the house. I didn't know what the house was. So I was a pledge, the oldest pledge in the

See **THOMPSON**, page 13

THOMPSON: 'make everybody feel warm and fuzzy'

Continued from page 12

fraternity."

Thompson started classes in fall 1963, majoring in mechanical engineering. Additionally, he tended bar and bused some tables in sorority houses, where free food was to be had.

Plus, he was enrolled in mandatory ROTC for the second semester of 1963 and the first semester of 1964. Come fall, Thompson and some of his fraternity brothers got into sport parachuting, "a brand new sport at the time."

In summer 1965, he and his roommate went to Grafton, North Dakota, and worked at the airport helping crop-duster pilots. He continued parachuting and made more than 100 jumps that summer.

Come fall Thompson returned to campus. Come semester break he and a law-school student friend headed to Texas to do some more jumping. But when his friend returned to school, he did not.

"I drifted around and ended up over at Texas A&M, because they had a parachute club there," Thompson explained. "They were really nice guys. Texas A&M was really a cool place."

But he never enrolled as a student; however, his new parachuting friends, who were also ROTC cadets, took care of him in a sort of shady, unorthodox and less-than-legal fashion: "They got me a meal card; they got me an ID card; and I was living in the ROTC dormitory. This went on for about three months."

Meanwhile Thompson had a cushy on-campus gig: working for a Ph.D. engineer in the Texas Transportation Institute. What Thompson called "a really good job" would be his undoing.

One morning he wasn't needed at work so he slept in: "I was sleeping on the top bunk and at 9 o'clock in the morning I feel these hands shaking me," was how Thompson explained his demise at A&M, laughing as he recalled it. "I look out and I'm right even with this lieutenant colonel and all I see is all the scrambled eggs on his hat and all the ribbons on him.

"And all he says is, 'Who are you?'" That was the end of any further discussion. The colonel looked at his watch and gave Thompson an ultimatum: "You will disappear at noon."

He did — sort of. He continued to work for the engineer and lived with his ROTC friends in a house they had off-campus. In May, he called his mother: something he often did when he needed money.

She let him know the draft board was looking for him. He hitched a ride back to Crookston. Come June 23, 1966, draft-ee Thompson was off to basic training in the United States Army.

Weird orders to the D.C. area

First came a bus trip to Fargo, where he was sworn in; then by air to Minneapolis; and finally another flight, in a DC-3, to Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, where he

underwent eight weeks of boot camp; he was the oldest soldier in his unit. Thompson found basic training uneventful; but an interesting assignment lay ahead of him — at a time when the war in Vietnam was heating up.

"After boot camp, most of the guys went to advanced infantry training. I didn't," he recalled. "I got these weird orders to report to the U.S. Army Exhibit Unit at Cameron Station in Alexandria, Virginia. I didn't know anything about this place."

At home on leave before reporting to his first duty station, he went to the Red Cross office in Crookston and learned that Alexandria was in the Washington, D.C. area.

Thompson flew into Washington National Airport and gathered up his gear. He found a cabby who got him to Cameron Station and helped him find the Exhibit Unit.

"Thompson, we've been looking for you," said the sergeant major who welcomed the private to his new assignment and gave him a tour of the building. He added, "You're going to like this place."

His job, using public information exhibits, would be to "preach the gospel about the Army. This is a soft-sell, make everybody feel warm and fuzzy about the Army. We're not trying to recruit people; but indirectly, I suppose we were."

However, in time one of Thompson's

weaknesses for the job was revealed: "Harry, we noticed you can't type worth a damn."

But that didn't defer his going on the road for six-weeks with a pilot exhibit showing the history of the Army. It was a two-man show: "Thousands of people came to see this and everybody liked it," Thompson said. "It had dayroom paintings showing the United States Army in battle."

Following the pilot run, Thompson and a fellow soldier took the exhibit on the road for about six weeks, displaying it in small towns and on college campuses. Then following leave, he and again a fellow soldier took the show on the road in 1967 for most of the year. One stop this go around was Crookston.

Come 1968, Thompson was a "short-timer" and he made one final road show prior to his discharge in June. Meanwhile, he got married and went back to UND, dropping his engineering major and picking up geography because he had acquired a love for aerial photography. His wife, Julie (Pennertz) taught school at Grand Forks AFB.

Following college, he went to work for Julie's father, making aluminum extrusions. It would become his life's work. Following retirement he came to Brookings in 1979.

Thompson has two married daughters and three grandchildren.

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Bringing a Taste of South Dakota to the World

CECIL: Photo training led to life of journalism

Continued from page 2

However, he explained, "In high school I tinkered around with photography, nothing great, just simple little contact prints and things like that in my basement. I thought being a photographer might get you in the front row at a lot of things; so I signed up for photo school."

He attended an eight-week school that brought him into the Naval Aviation community. Next came Aerial Photography School at Naval Air Station, Pensacola, Florida.

"It was very interesting and very intense," Cecil explained. "I got out of that and went to a two-year tour at NAS Atsugi, Japan. That turned out to be very interesting and very rewarding."

He made several flights along the coastline of Korea but noted that he was never in danger. He used a huge camera that could shoot 100 feet of 9-inch by 12-inch black-and-white film. He also processed the film, which was then looked at for evidence of gun emplacements and troop movements.

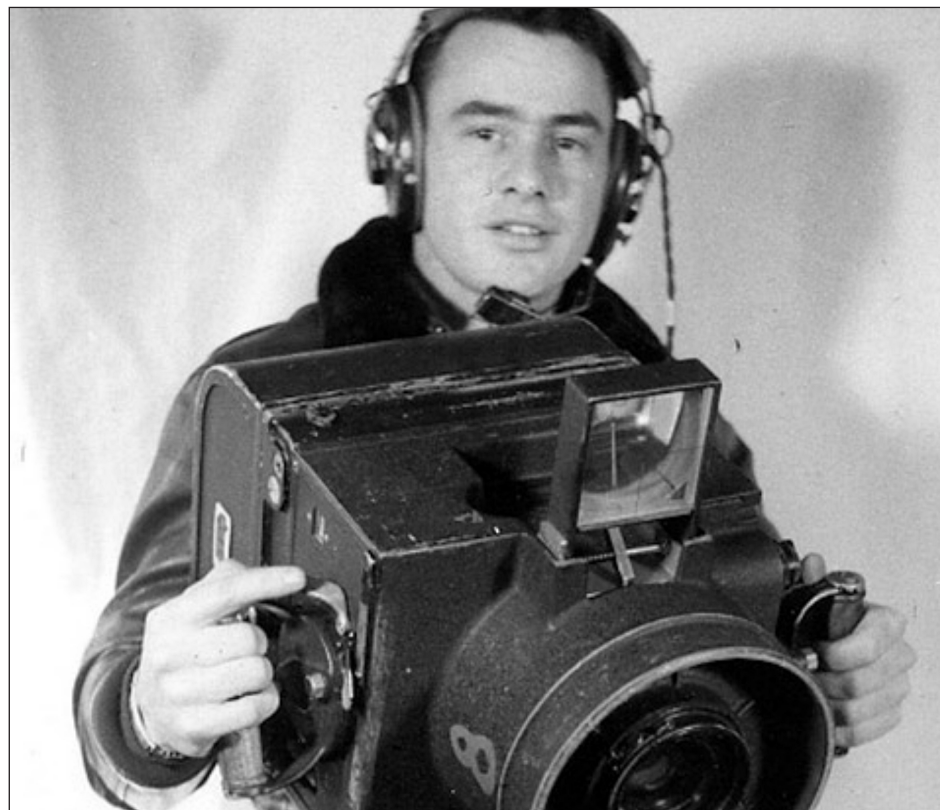
As a "base photographer," Cecil pulled duty once a week. On one occasion he and two Marines were heloed to a mountainous area where a jet had crashed: the Marines guarded the site and he took photos. On the return to base, the helo ran into heavy fog and had to land in a rice paddy.

"It was kind of exciting," he recalled. "We had to spend the night there."

Cecil became well-versed in the history of the Atsugi area: During World War II, it had been used to train Japanese kamikaze-suicide pilots. And Douglas MacArthur landed there after the war when as Supreme Commander Allied Powers he came to oversee the occupation of Japan from 1945 to 1952.

During his down time, Cecil did a lot of touring around Japan, shooting photos with his own personal camera. A highlight for him was climbing Mount Fuji but having to turn back when inclement weather struck.

Following his duty in Japan, Cecil spent three months aboard an LSD (landing ship dock) returning to San Diego; from



Courtesy image

Chuck Cecil with the camera he used in the Navy to take aerial photographs.

there he went to Ream Field at Imperial Beach, California, where the Navy had based helicopters. Again he was a base photographer. One of his duties was to photograph "submarine torpedo practice" from a helicopter.

He recalled one harrowing experience when the helo he was on had to land on a submarine so a helicopter window could be repaired.

Looking back to those long-ago decades, Cecil, a petty officer second-class (Photographer's Mate Second Class aka PH2) when his enlistment was up, said, "In fact I considered staying in the Navy. I loved it: good food, you always had a good bed to sleep in. It was exciting." Add to that extra dollars every month via flight pay.

As his active duty commitment neared its end, he was tempted to volunteer for "Operation Deep Freeze." He would have had to spend a year "wintering over" at the South Pole. And photographers were needed.

"I thought that would be kind of fun, but I would have had to reenlist for another

four years," Cecil explained. "I wanted to get out and figure out what I wanted to do with my life." Released from four years of active duty in 1955, he was 23 years old.

Stuff to put under pictures

"I figured, what am I going to do?" the new veteran pondered. "Well, my buddies from Rapid City had been going to (South Dakota) State College. Where's that? Brookings. Where's that?"

"I figured maybe I could learn how to write cutlines. I knew this was stuff you put under pictures. I could take pictures for a newspaper.

"So I took journalism. I got to where I liked to write a little longer than a cutline."

He graduated from SDSC in 1959. As a student, he spent one summer working for the late Ralph Herseth on his gubernatorial campaign. The GI Bill paid him \$110 a month. Add to that extra money earned working in the photo lab. Finally, he was paid to distribute four-per pack samplers of Camel cigarettes.

"I had various displays on campus," Cecil said, smiling. Laughing, he added,

"I had a Camel-cigarette display case in the bookstore for awhile." He also worked occasionally at the *Register* developing film.

In the decades following graduation from SDSC, Cecil would go on to a decades-long nonpareil career tied to the world of print: as owner of about 10 local newspapers; as a publisher; as an award-winning columnist; on the faculty at South Dakota State University, where he is an instructor emeritus of Journalism and Mass Communications; and as a writer on a variety of subjects tied to local history, local personages and local color.

"It was a lot of fun, I really enjoyed it," he said of those days in newspapering. "I'd walk in and say, 'I'd be interested in buying your newspaper,' to some of these old lead-type newspaper men.

"These guys knew computers were coming. They didn't want to get involved with computers. They were tired of putting out papers. I made deals with all of them and bought them." Cecil would go to be one of the pioneers in moving from the world of lead to the age of computers.

"I don't know if I was the first in South Dakota," he said. "But I was one of the first to use a computer and combine all of the papers. We'd have all the subscriptions on a computer for the whole thing; and stories that were more than just a local story would go in all of them."

In time Cecil sold off his newspapers; he retired in 2000.

Since then he has written more than 25 books. "They're mostly history books," he explained.

"They're not something I made up in my mind. I wish I could. They're more historic adventure."

Perhaps with more than nine decades behind him, there might be a Chuck Cecil historic adventure that's book-worthy?

Chuck married Mary Wilber from Brookings in 1959. They have three children: Matthew Cecil is interim provost and vice chancellor for academic and student affairs at University of Wisconsin (Parkside); Dr. Dan Cecil is a board-certified internist at Avera Medical Group Brookings; and Amy Holm is a teacher.

The Cecils have five grandchildren.

TESCH: Honored for his valor as a surgeon

Continued from page 3

“We kind of stood around and looked the place over. All of a sudden all those bushes (surrounding the field) had active Viet Cong. We were there for about 3 ½ hours and didn’t accomplish anything (on negotiations with the Viet Cong for release of three POWs). We didn’t give an inch. We called the helicopter and set up a time for New Year’s Day, 1969, a week later.” This time, again with no give to the Viet Cong, the negotiations worked and the three POWs were freed.

The doctor returned to Bearcat and served as a field surgeon. He would have other assignments before he returned to CONUS in October 1969.

One of them was with the Medical Civilian Action Program aka MEDCAP. “We would go into the little villages all the way around Bearcat, maybe once every week or two weeks,” Tesch explained. “We’d treat everything that walked across the line in the middle of the village, no matter what it was. You stayed on this side (of the line) and treated everything. You’d feel relatively safe doing that.”

Following those days in the field, Tesch was trans-

ferred to Long Binh, where one of his duties was to treat American soldiers who were prisoners in the brig.

“When I went to see the prisoners, I always took a guard with me,” he said. “The prisoners were a variety of interesting, interesting people. Some of them were bad guys, druggies.”

The last couple months of the doctor’s tour he was assigned to a clinic in Long Binh. “We’d go to work at 6 or 7 in the morning and by noon we were done. It was just a snap for those two months. We had real food, a nice mess hall. It was good.”

Like all the American troops who served in Vietnam, he got a respite from his year-long tour of duty.

Tesch got a week’s R & R (rest and relaxation in January 1969; he spent it with his wife Jan at a luxurious hotel in Hawaii.

The Teschs have two sons and three grandchildren.

An honored veteran

Tesch’s actions in Vietnam were duly noted by Nebraska Wesleyan University and the State of South Dakota.

In 2023, he was one of six NWU alumni Legends

and Legacies awardees; he was honored with the John Rosentrater Act of Valor Award. His service in Vietnam as a medical officer (surgeon) was cited and an article about his service was printed in the Summer 2023 issue of Archways-Nebraska Wesleyan University Magazine.

Additionally, in an article titled “War’s Fog: A retired ophthalmologist refocuses on Vietnam, 1969,” Tesch’s account of his role in the negotiations that led to release of three American POW held captive by the Viet Cong was recounted. The negotiators gave “not 1 inch” in obtaining the release of the three soldiers and in so doing denied the Viet Cong a propagandistic victory.

On Sept. 16, 2006, Tesch was one of the Vietnam veterans honored by Gov. Mike Rounds and Maj. Gen. Michael Gorman, South Dakota adjutant general, at “A Parade and Dedication Ceremony for the South Dakota Vietnam War Memorial” on the grounds of the State capitol in Pierre.

In “The Vietnam War: South Dakota Remembers,” a book published by the Pierre Area Chamber of Commerce at the time of the dedication, Tesch recounts in his own words his role in the release of the POWs via negotiations on Christmas Day 1968 and New Year’s Day 1969.



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