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Center for the Study of War and Society

Spring 2010

War Stories Spring 2010

Center for the Study of War & Society

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Spring 2010
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THE UNIVERSITY of
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DIRECTOR'S NOTE

We begin our first newsletter with thanks to all the friends, supporters, and well-wishers of the center who helped us celebrate our 25th anniversary last year! The year marked happy milestones—our progress in digitizing fragile tape-recordings, the Wilson lecture, the Johnson lecture, and your generous response to our launch of the new Friends of the Center campaign—but we also had sad news of the loss of our dear friend and loyal supporter, Mr. Edgar Wilson.

In 2010 we continue our progress in building an online digital archive featuring our rich collections, training four enthusiastic undergraduate interns in transcribing and historical editing, and launching other new ventures. Our volunteer task force—Faye Muly, Lois Dearolf, and George Sinkankas are of tremendous help. As we plan for the center's next 25 years, we are most grateful for our long-standing supporters. Thank you for sharing the vision of all that CSWS can be.

—**Vejas G. Liulevicius, director**

When the late Dr. Charles W. Johnson founded the Center for the Study of War and Society, veterans, like Edgar C. Wilson (UTK '40) wanted to do more. Without being asked, he offered financial support, encouragement, and steadfast friendship for more than two decades. I was blessed and inspired by his friendship for the last 10 years, so I asked his good friend Jack Draper to write an appreciation based on the eulogy he gave at Edgar Wilson's funeral. As you read this tribute, please think of the veteran or veterans in your life and thank them, if you can, for their service. We cannot say thank-you enough. —**Cynthia L. Tinker, program coordinator**

Edgar Wilson: Gentleman, Soldier, Friend



I became acquainted with Edgar through our membership at First Christian Church in Knoxville. Both Edgar and his wife Beatrice (“Jerry”) were members of a Sunday School class I taught. When Edgar's nephew called me last December to tell me about his uncle's death and the funeral arrangements, he asked me to “bring a word about Edgar” and share it during the service.

The thought of “bringing a word about Edgar” created a dilemma for me. Lawyers, even retired ones like me, are not accustomed to dealing with just “a word.” Moreover, how could anyone pick “a word” to describe Edgar Wilson? But after considerable thought, I settled upon three words to capture the essence of the man I knew and deeply respected. To me, Edgar was a gentleman, a citizen-soldier, and a friend.

My dictionary defines *gentleman* as “a man of good family breeding or social position.” While I would have no problem proving that Edgar fit that definition, it seemed a bit stiff and formal. However, when I looked up the definition of *gentle*, the words I found seemed to jump from the page and attach themselves to Edgar: “kindly, amiable, polite, refined, courteous, honorable, respectable.” These words truly describe Edgar Wilson, and if I might add “always well groomed,” the description would almost be complete.

In my mind, the word *Christian*, meaning a person who is humble, decent, and generous, is a fine and frequent companion of the word *gentleman* and also adheres to Edgar Wilson like glue. Edgar and Jerry were generous benefactors of Milligan College in Greeneville, Tennessee, but you would never hear it from them. He was also a longtime substantial supporter of the Center for the Study of War and Society at the University of Tennessee, but again without fanfare except in the minds of those who conceived and nurtured the center.

The word *soldier* also described Edgar. His military service intrigued me, and on occasion, I plumbed his memories of his military experience. It was difficult for me to comprehend how this quiet, mild-mannered former teacher could be a World War II battlefield hero, but

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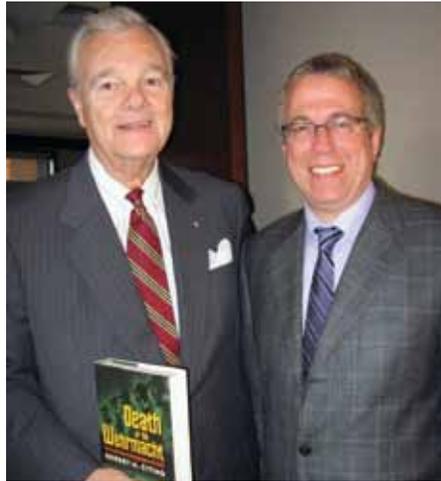
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10TH ANNUAL CHARLES W. JOHNSON LECTURE

"Pride or Prejudice? Military History and the Academy," was the title of the lecture given by Dr. Robert M. Citino for the Charles W. Johnson Lecture on November 16, 2009, at the Howard H. Baker Center for Public Policy. Dr. Citino, one of the country's most distinguished military historians, is an associate professor of history at the University of North Texas and is a fellow of the UNT Military History Center.

The author of eight books—most recently *Death of the Wehrmacht*—Citino served as Visiting Professor of Military History at West Point during academic year 2008–09. His provocative lecture focused on the "estrangement between military history and the broader historical profession." He spoke about the "once dominant trinity—political, diplomatic, and military" history and why it "gave way, or was elbowed out of the way, by a new one—race, class, and gender." He advised military historians to remain determined, even though change may be distant. Before the lecture, a lively reception for CSWS supporters, veterans, and students was held.

The late Charles W. Johnson taught military history in the UTK History Department from 1965 to 1998. A gifted teacher, he was named 1985's Outstanding Teacher of the Year by the UT Alumni Association. Johnson and the late Dr. Charles O. Jackson published *City behind a Fence: Oak Ridge, Tennessee, 1942–1946* in 1981. Three years later Johnson founded the Center for the Study of War and Society. He conducted hundreds of interviews with veterans and built an extensive World War II manuscript collection. In 1992 he helped organize the university's popular interdisciplinary Normandy Scholars Program. In honor of his efforts, the Charles W. Johnson Lecture on American Military History was established in 2000 as a tribute to the rich legacy of one of the History Department's most accomplished and esteemed colleagues.



LEFT: GUEST SPEAKER DR. ROBERT M. CITINO PRESENTS A COPY OF HIS LATEST BOOK, *DEATH OF THE WEHRMACHT*, TO U.S. ARMY VETERAN AND CSWS SUPPORTER COL. BILL FELTON AT THE JOHNSON LECTURE RECEPTION.



RIGHT: WWII VETERANS AND CSWS SUPPORTERS EDGAR WILSON, JAMES POINTER, AND EUGENE SWARTZ SHARE STORIES AT THE JOHNSON LECTURE RECEPTION IN THE BOARDROOM OF THE HOWARD BAKER CENTER.

★ Edgar Wilson, *continued from page 1* ★

that incomprehension probably shows how little I know about the stuff of which heroes are made. Edgar was trained in the field artillery branch, but on arrival in the European Theater, he was assigned to an infantry unit as a forward observer. He operated on the front line with a radio man/Jeep driver to serve as the eyes of the artillery battery, typically positioned some distance to the rear. Edgar became so attached to the frontline GIs that he was loath to take any other assignment. When he reported to the commanding officer of his artillery unit after a period of leave, to his chagrin the CO said, "Willie, you're not going back to the infantry." While Edgar didn't disobey this order, he found a way around it, and back to the front he went!

The Silver Star, the third-highest U.S. military decoration awarded for "gallantry in action against an enemy of the United States," was only one of Edgar's military achievements. He told me about the events that led to this citation, but my memory simply is not sharp enough now to recount them. The total number of Silver Star recipients is estimated to be 100,000 to 150,000. That seems like a large number until you consider all the U.S. military personnel who have faced the enemy in armed conflict over the last century.

Edgar was a typical citizen soldier. His plans hadn't included service in the military, but when events led to his call, he responded without hesitation. When the conflict finally ended, Edgar laid aside his uniform and his decorations, and pursued a varied, successful career in Tennessee agriculture. Edgar Wilson has now passed from our midst, and his passing causes me concern for the welfare of our great country—a concern centered on the fear that our supply of Edgar Wilsons may be dangerously low.

Last, but hardly least, Edgar Wilson was a friend to me and to a multitude of others. To me a friend is a person in whose presence I find joy and pleasure, but my friendship with Edgar was hardly an association of equals. His accomplishments far exceed anything I have done; I looked up to him with sincere admiration, and his passing has left a void in my life.

Edgar Wilson—gentleman, soldier, friend; I rest my case.

—Jack B. Draper

(Wilson's complete three-part interview can be found at web.utk.edu/~csws/interview.html)

War and Society Archival Collection

The center collects letters, diaries, scrapbooks, photos, memoirs, and unit histories of America's veterans. Comprising mostly World War II material, the collection also contains material related to World War I, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, and Operation Desert Storm.

A recent addition is the collection of WWII veteran Col. Joseph E. Martin, who served with 2nd Battalion, 7th Infantry Division. His daughter and son-in-law, Carolyn Martin Bryan and Dr. Charles F. Bryan (UTK '78), of Richmond, Virginia, personally delivered the trove of letters, scrapbooks, diaries, and manuals, which span the 1930s to the 1950s.

Also received was a rare collection of more than a thousand letters of WWI veteran James T. Sloan Jr., spanning the years 1915 through 1920, donated by Sloan's grandson, Frank F. Turner of Plano, Texas. Mr. Turner wrote an engaging introduction to the collection, which will assist anyone researching the letters. Especially interesting are the letters written during Sloan's time in Texas during the Pancho Villa campaign.

The World War II/War and Society Collection is archived by the University Libraries' Special Collections. Its materials are available upon request for viewing and research only. For more information go to lib.utk.edu/special or call 865-974-4480.

OPEN HOUSE



ABOVE (FROM LEFT TO RIGHT): WWII RED CROSS VETERAN DR. VEDA BATEMAN, RETHA HANKINS, AND LYNN TITTSWORTH; VIETNAM VETERAN FRED OWENS; LEROY ROGERS (IN HIS ORIGINAL JACKET) AND OTHERS ENJOY GOOD FOOD AND GOOD CONVERSATION.

VETERANS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Last October we completed our first digitization project. All 111 interviews conducted under the directorship of Dr. Kurt Piehler from 1999 to 2008 were converted from analog audiocassettes to digital WAV files. Each interviewee, or his or her family, received a CD of the digitized interview. In the future, all interviews conducted during the tenure of Dr. Charles W. Johnson will be digitized. The veteran or his or her family has final approval of the transcribed and proofed interviews. The interviews are then linked to the CSWS website at web.utk.edu/~csws. Click "Veterans Oral History Project" to access our latest additions:

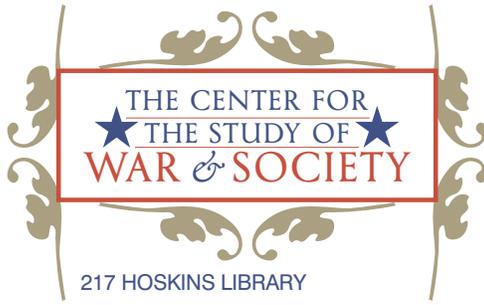
- **Richard T. Alexander**, WWII, Europe, U.S. Army, 83rd Division Artillery
- **Cecelia S. Koch**, WWII, Europe, U.S. Army Nurse Corps
- **George R. McIntosh**, WWII, Europe, U.S. Army, 63rd Infantry Division
- **Neal O'Steen**, WWII, Pacific, U.S. Navy, USS ATR-23, Navy Reserve 1947-51
- **Samuel J. Smith**, WWII, Pacific, U.S. Marine Corps, Navajo Code Talker

KLEIN'S CORNER

"Klein's Corner" presents an excerpt from the collection of the late Dr. Milton Klein, highlighting the university's 200-year military history tradition. Klein served as Alumni Professor of History at UTK from 1969 to 1984. From 1988 until 1997 he was UT's first university historian. To celebrate UT's bicentennial, Klein published *Volunteer Moments: Vignettes of the History of the University of Tennessee, 1794-1994*. Before his academic career Klein served from 1942 to 1946 with the Air Transport Command in the Army Air Corps.

Each time the color guard marches onto the field before a football game, the distinctive uniforms of its members revive the memory of a company of Tennessee Volunteers that sought victory in the Mexican War almost 150 years ago. Unlike the color guard, the first Knoxville Dragoons found that wearing the colorful uniform meant facing all the drudgery and dangers of war. Drudgery came in completing one of the longest marches of the conflict—1,500 miles from Knoxville to the seaport of Tampico, Mexico, before boarding ships to Vera Cruz for battle. They served as artillerymen at Vera Cruz, chased down a force of 500 Mexicans at Medelin Bridge, came under attack at Cerro Gordo, and advanced as far as Jalapa. Approximately one year later, a gala homecoming reception for the Volunteers was held in Knoxville. The Dragoons' war record was recognized among the many toasts—action in two major battles and assorted skirmishes, countless miles of escort and courier duty across the inhospitable plains and mountains of Mexico. There had been honor, if not glory. As long as the UTK color guard wears the Dragoon uniform, the honor is remembered.

(Excerpted from "Honor If Not Glory," by Neal O'Steen (UTK '50), WWII and Korean War veteran, and former editor of the *Tennessee Alumnus*. *Tennessee Alumnus*, Vol. 6, No. 4, 1987.)



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Pam Reeves, in honor of Fred Reeves
Melbourne "Leroy" Rogers, in honor of his wife, Fay Rogers
Eldred M. Swingen and Regina A. Lee, in honor of Edgar C. Wilson

Isabel Bonnyman Stanley
John W. Towle
Jack E. and Carolyn Williams
W. Lewis Wood Jr.

Fort Sanders

Stephen V. Ash, in honor of Dr. Charles W. Johnson
John R. Finger and Judi Gaston, in honor of Dr. Charles W. Johnson
Bradley Keefer
Donnell W. Morrison
Samuel A. Shipman
Loretta Sowers
Bobby Jo Wilson

Honor Guard

Thomas W. Bond, in honor of Jessie Smith
David D. Dickey
Stanley R. Dinsmore
Susanne E. Eddowes, in honor of William A. Malloy
Fred L. Hart, in honor of Ryen King, 82nd Airborne, KIA Iraq, 2007
Clifford R. Hope
William W. Hurt, in honor of Col. Cecil A. Hurt
William J. Kelch
Delbert Marks, in honor of the Center for the Study of War and Society
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