



SOONER SPIRIT



A Daily Publication of the 2005 19th National Veterans Golden Age Games

Wednesday, May 25, 2005

Colonel Darby Ranger Participates in the Golden Age Games

by Rebecca Shinneman, PAO, Marion, Ill. VA Medical Center

Charles “Chuck” Leighton, 83, began his military career in 1939 with the Army National Guard. In February 1941, he was activated with the 109th Engineers, 34th Division, Camp Claiborne, La. In February 1942, he was shipped to Ireland. While training there, he was selected to receive one month of special training.



WWII veteran Chuck Leighton of San Diego, Calif. shares his experiences as one of the first Army Rangers.

On June 19, 1942, the first Ranger unit was officially activated, and Leighton was among the first who served in what we now know as the Army Rangers. One of the first Americans trained in commando style tactics by the British commandos, Leighton served under Colonel William Darby who formed the 1st Ranger Battalion.

On November 8, 1942, in support of Operation Torch (the Allied invasion of Africa) Colonel Darby’s Rangers lead the way. They went into Arzew, North Africa at night. “I was the VRA gunner – or Browning automatic rifleman – which took

out machine gun nests,” Leighton said. When he was 14 miles behind enemy lines, he was injured in the lower leg. “I thought I had just sprained my ankle so I walked the 14 miles back out. I was sent to the hospital, where I learned I had broken my ankle in several places.” Although he was unable to remain with the Rangers after his injury, he did not leave the

military and was reassigned to the 716th Military Police Battalion. He later received a bronze star for his bravery and selfless acts during the Operation Torch campaign.

Leighton became a combat instructor for the Officers Training School at Camp Smith, N.Y. He worked with the “live fire” exercise, which entailed shooting machine guns over the soldier’s heads while live charges were going off around them. The Army officers received the refresher training before they deployed to the Pacific and European Theatres during WWII.

When Leighton was not training, he performed other special duties, such as escorting German prisoners and wounded soldiers. He also served as an honor guard for President Roosevelt’s funeral in Hyde Park, N.Y.

Eventually, the 1st Ranger Battalion split into six battalions which spearheaded the invasions of Sicily and Italy. “I learned that the men from the original 1st Battalion were sent back to the U.S. or put into a new unit called the Special Forces,” Leighton said.

See “Ranger,” page 3



Different Lives One Defining Day

by Rebecca Shinneman
PAO, Marion, Ill. VA Medical Center

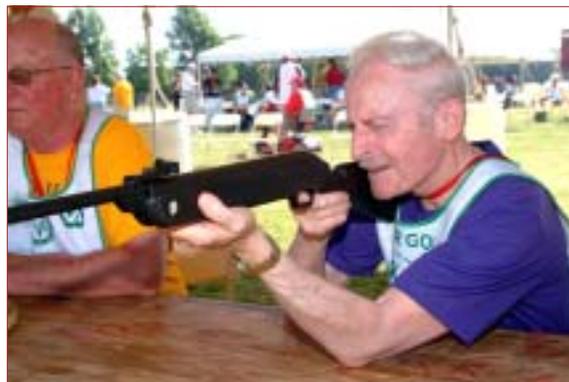
All of us have defining moments in our lives when you know that things will never be the same. Two World War II veterans have lived very different lives and experiences but both have the same defining day. Channing Gilson and Rayburn Crawford are first time room-mates this year at the Golden Age Games. As they chatted about their military experiences they both realized that D-Day, June 6, 1944, was a defining moment in both of their lives. Channing graduated from the West Point Academy the same day that Rayburn as an Army paratrooper landed in Holland. As Channing said, "I was graduating and thinking about my future and Rayburn was lying there wounded in Holland."

Channing went on to become a B-29 pilot for the Air Force and served in the Pacific Theater. He can be found during the games entertaining other participants after the evening meal in the 3rd floor lounge of Walker Towers. Channing has been playing the piano in the evening for the past three years. "It is becoming a tradition for me to play at the games," said Channing.



Rayburn Crawford of Encinitas, Calif.

Rayburn returned home and continued service working for the United States government. At 50 years of age Rayburn was ready to retire. During his pre-retirement physical it was discovered he had life-threatening



Channing Gilson of San Diego, Calif.

cardiovascular problems. His father had died at 61 and his older brother at 51. Rayburn was headed on the same path as them. He started eating right, exercising and getting treated. Now at 81, he competes in the Senior Olympics and the Golden Age Games. "Exercise, exercise and exercise till you're hopelessly addicted. It is my elixir," stated Rayburn.

One day and many years later Channing and Rayburn are competing and creating new memories in both their lives together as friends defined by one day 61 years ago.



We Need Your Photo!

We are missing identification photos of the following:

Jimmy Richardson, #254
Danny Proctor, #498



If you want photos to go with your hometown news release, please stop by the Media Center, Forum Bldg., Wing B, and let us take your photo!

Secretary Nicholson Visits

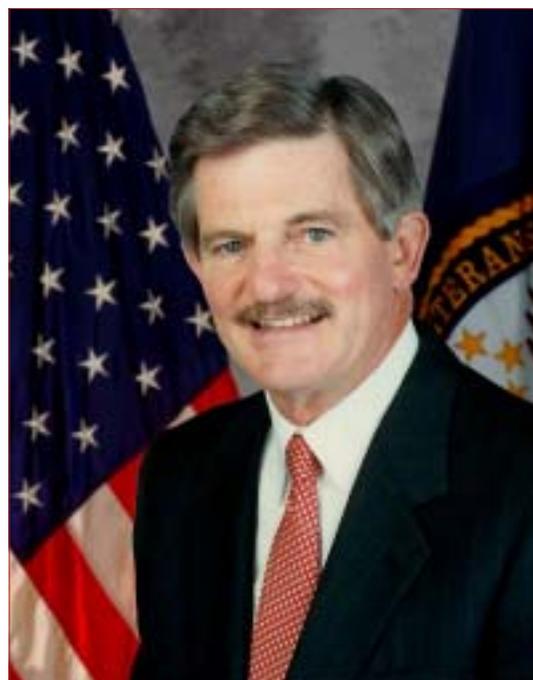
Secretary of Veterans Affairs Jim Nicholson arrives today for his first visit to the National Veterans Golden Age Games. Look for him as he visits with participants and attends some of the events today and tomorrow.

Speaking of our Golden Age participants, Nicholson said, "Those friends and neighbors who stood tall for freedom 30, 40, and even 50 years ago in the military are now among our most distinguished veterans. They earned our respect and gratitude when they were in uniform. They continue to inspire us today."

A graduate of West Point, Nicholson served eight years on active duty as a paratrooper and Ranger-qualified Army officer, then 22 years in the Army Reserve, retiring with the rank of colonel. He is a decorated veteran of the Vietnam War.

Nicholson was nominated by President Bush to serve as Secretary of Veterans Affairs on December 9, 2004. He was unanimously confirmed by the U.S. Senate on January 26, 2005, and was sworn into office on February 1. Just prior to joining the President's Cabinet, he served as the U.S. Ambassador to the Vatican.

As Secretary of Veterans Affairs, Nicholson is the principal advocate for veterans in the U.S. government, ensuring that they receive the care, support, recognition and



VA Secretary Jim Nicholson

dignity they deserve for their service to our country.

Secretary Nicholson is also scheduled to address the participants at the Closing Ceremonies tomorrow night.

"Ranger," continued from page 1

Leighton was discharged from the military in November 1945 and moved to California with his wife. In 1958, he went to Hollywood and served as a technical advisor for the making of the film "Darby's Rangers," starring James Garner. The film chronicled the development of the first Army Rangers and their accomplishments during WWII.

This is Leighton's fourth time participating in the Golden Age Games, competing this week in bowling, nine ball and croquet. He continues to remain active

with veterans groups and serves as a trustee for the Mt. Soledad Veterans Memorial in San Diego. Like so many other competitors, Leighton enjoys the fellowship at the Golden Age Games, saying, "I again feel that camaraderie I felt as a Ranger."



PHOTOS FROM THE GAMES



Norman Cross of Duncanville, Texas, propels the disc with his shuffleboard cue.



Barbara Rembert of Anchorage, Alaska, displays her bowling skills.



Richard Purdie of Martinsburg, W.Va. bowls a strike!



Karol Smith of Big Spring, Texas, throws a horseshoe.



OOPS!

In Tuesday's *Sooner Spirit* we misidentified the gentlemen in the bottom two photos of page 4. Our phenomenal golfer is really Warren Cathcart of Los Angeles, Calif. and the outstanding swimmer is Willie Evans of Milledgeville, Ga. Our apologies, gentlemen!



Native American dancers invite veterans to join them in the “Round Dance” also known as the “friendship dance.”

Native American Veteran Pow Wow



Veterans look on as Native Americans demonstrate their “Honor Dance.” It is a celebration dance performed for those going to or returning from war.



Rino Rimoldi of Garden Grove, Calif. places his domino with confidence.



Forney Johnson of San Diego, Calif. strategizes his next move.



PHOTOS FROM
THE GAMES

Coaches Corner

We interviewed some of the dedicated coaches who are here with their teams at the 19th National Veterans Golden Age Games this week. This is what just a few of them had to say about their experience at the Games.

Tom Artura, Recreation Therapist, Northport VAMC, Number of Competitors: 13

“We’re all having a wonderful time. Our veterans are giving it their very best and this is so good for their self-esteem. The food is good, the camaraderie is great and we’ve won 11 medals so far!” (*Team Name: The Long Islanders*)

Jeffery Gregory, Recreation Therapy Assistant, Des Moines VAMC, Number of Competitors: 2

“Coming to the Games lets our veterans stay active all year. They maintain contact with each other and they have a good time while they are here. We try to train for the events every week, and we’ll start planning for next year right after we get back home.” (*Team Name: The Iowa Chargers*)

Jesse Lofgren, Recreation Therapist, Togus VAMC, Number of Competitors: 14

“Coming to the Golden Age Games helps our team members get involved with other people. It’s good for self-esteem and helps people get out of their shells. I think they will bring back the things that they’ve learned here to help them in their everyday lives.” (*Team Name: The Maine-iacs*)

Erin Atkinson, Recreation Therapist, Dublin VAMC, Number of Competitors: 4

“I like this event because it is so good for this age

group, and it encourages veterans to live healthier, longer lives. It also shows that sports can be for everyone. Our veterans love being here. One of them told me, ‘Now I know what you were talking about and I’m so glad I came.’ They came, they competed and now they’re hooked. (*Team Name: Georgia Golden Peaches*)

Jane Kereven, Recreation Therapist, Loma Linda VAMC, Number of Competitors: 20

“Everybody tells you how to be a parent, but nobody tells you how to age, and face the physical and mental challenges of aging. The Golden Age Games gives veterans a purpose and lets them belong to a team again. I want the Games to continue to grow, as they are a wonderful thing.” (*Team Name: Loma Linda Golden Age Team*)

Bill Lofthouse, Kinesiotherapist, Hines VAMC, Number of Competitors: 7

“The Games enable us to see our patients out of the hospital setting and in a recreational, leisurely environment. It gives them a way to connect with other people, and share things with people they all have things in common with. It’s one big happy family at this event, and it lets people from the outside see what these veterans are capable of. The reason we’re all here is because of what these veterans have done for us so many years ago.” (*Name of Team: The Windy City Rollerz*)

Thank you, coaches, for everything you do all year to help our veterans come to the Golden Age Games!

Reminders:

The hospitality area in the Walker Tower lobby will remain open from 8 a.m. - 9 p.m. through tomorrow.

Student massage therapists will continue to offer free massages from 1-7 p.m. through tomorrow in the Walker Tower lobby.

The Veterans History Project interview schedule is full. If you still want to participate, stop by Room B6 in the Forum Building and they will try to schedule you. If you do have an appointment, please be sure to keep it.



Breakfast — 6 a.m. - 8 a.m.
Lunch — 11 a.m. - 1 p.m.
Dinner — 5 p.m. - 7 p.m.

The Cyber Cafe is open in the Forum Bldg., Room C2. It is open daily from 6 a.m. to 12 a.m. It closes on Thursday at 3 p.m.



VCS Bingo Blowout Tonight

Just like the *Price is Right* (well, almost), this year's VCS Bingo Blowout is filled with fabulous prizes and a special treat.

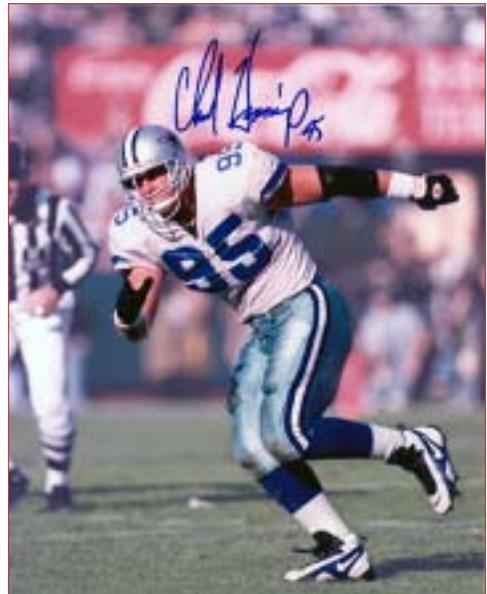
One of the highlight sof tonight's event is a scheduled celebrity appearance. VCS and MCI have teamed up to present Chad Hennings, fellow veteran and NFL super star!

Before his professional football career, Hennings was a member of the U.S. Air Force. While attending the Air Force Academy, Hennings became an all-star member on the football team. In 1987, he was named to the All-American team, set a Western Athletic Conference record with 24 sacks, and was awarded the Outland Trophy in recognition of being the best interior lineman in the country on offense or defense in college football.

Following graduation, Hennings served as a pilot of the A-10 tankbuster and in the final days of the Gulf War. He flew 45 missions in support of Operation Provide Comfort in northern Iraq, an effort that helped provide relief and humanitarian aid to Kurdish refugees.

After his discharge, Hennings joined the Dallas Cowboys, quickly earning a starting position as a defensive lineman. He spent his entire 9-year professional football career with the Cowboys, retiring in 2001 with three Super Bowl rings.

We are deeply grateful to VCS and MCI for bringing Hennings to tonight's VCS Bingo Blowout!! You won't want to miss it!



Former Dallas Cowboy Chad Hennings will be our special guest at this evening's VCS Bingo Blowout.



Quotes from the Competitors:

"I really enjoy the Golden Age Games and this is my second time competing. I also participate in other games as I love the feeling of competing."

~ Josephine Kimbro, Reno, Nev.

"I first started competing when my VA nurse told me about the Games and encouraged me to participate. I am now competing in my fourth Golden Age Games and am learning new things every year - such as croquet."

~ Joe Bauer, Leavenworth, Kan.

"I grew up playing horseshoes and knew I had to participate in horseshoes at the Golden Age Games because it reminded me of my childhood."

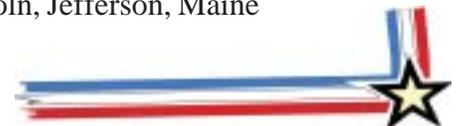
~ Webster Rose, Hampton, Va.

"I have participated in five Games. However, I am really looking forward to next year as I enjoy helping veterans whether as a VA volunteer or a coach."

~ Thomas Hoffler, Tyner, N.C.

"This is my first time participating at the Golden Age Games and I am very glad I listened to my recreation therapist when she encouraged me to go. I serve as a VA volunteer and have 16,745 volunteer hours and have been active for 26 years. However, I think the Golden Age Games are just as fun as volunteering."

~ Fred Lincoln, Jefferson, Maine





SCHEDULE OF EVENTS FOR...

Wednesday, May 25, 2005

6 a.m. - 8 a.m.	Breakfast, Couch Cafeteria
8 a.m. - 5 p.m.	Nine-Ball, Coach's Bar & Grill
8 a.m. - 5 p.m.	Table Tennis Houston Huffman Center
9 a.m.	Nat'l. Cowboy & Western Museum, OKC
10 a.m.	Trail Ride Thunderbird Stables Norman
11 a.m. - 1 p.m.	Lunch, Couch Cafeteria
1 p.m.	Thunderbird Wild Wild West Casino, Norman
3 p.m. - 5 p.m.	Medal Ceremonies OCCE Commons Restaurant
5 p.m. - 7 p.m.	Dinner, Couch Cafeteria
6 p.m. - 7:30 p.m.	Coach's Reception University Club
7 p.m. - 9 p.m.	VCS Bingo Blowout Houston Huffman Center
9 p.m. - 12 a.m.	Sooner Shindig Forum Building Conference Room A



Transportation Schedule

Transportation for alternate activities will depart from the front of Walker Tower. Please check at the alternate activities table for more information and departure times.

DAILY WEATHER FORECAST

60% chance for Thunderstorms
High 80° / Low 67°
Easterly Winds 10 - 20 mph

WHEELCHAIR REPAIR

The Wheelchair Repair room is open from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. in Walker Tower to handle repair needs. For after hour emergencies, call Greg Rosales at (405) 409-7082.

For Your Spiritual Health

The Chaplain's office is located in Walker Tower, 2 East Study Lounge. Chaplains will be available daily from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. until Friday, May 27 at noon. Or, you can call (405) 606-9218. For after hours or emergencies (from 5 p.m. to 8 a.m.), please call (405) 606-9220.

Police and On-Site Security

Oklahoma City VA Medical Center Police will provide 24-hour, on-site security in the Forum Building. Police officers are responsible for monitoring the safety of participants at special events as well as safeguarding money, computer equipment and supplies. Contact Officer Tim Collins at (405) 640-0287 if you need police assistance.



Medical support will be available from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. daily and until noon on Friday in rooms 328 and 329W in the Walker Tower. Medical staff will be available 24 hours each day, but after 8 p.m., rooms 328 and 329W are for emergencies only.

Don't forget your bandanna! The *Hugs Project* has provided every veteran with a neck bandanna that can be dampened to help cool you down!



Look for the daily Sooner Spirit on the Web at:

www.veteransgoldenagegames.org