

# History of Memorial Day and Ties to Swain County

By Tony Monnat for Friends of the Bryson City Cemetery, May 24, 2022



# History of Memorial Day and Ties to Swain County

- Origins and History of Memorial Day
- How We Should Honor Memorial Day Today
- Two Stories of FBCC Military Veterans

# Origins – Honoring Fallen Warriors

## 431 BCE – Peloponnesian War

- Greeks held public funeral for those killed
- Pericles was chosen to give a speech – Funeral Oration
- A tribute to Athenian culture, to democracy and freedom
- A celebration of the men who are willing to die for their city



# Origins and History of Memorial Day in U.S.

Civil War – Approx. 650,000 Federal and Confederate Soldiers killed – Deadliest of all American wars

Confederate families decorated graves of fallen soldiers – Possibly akin to Appalachian tradition?

1861 – First Confederate casualty buried in Warrenton, VA - Family decorated grave



# Origins and History of Memorial Day in U.S.

General John A. Logan

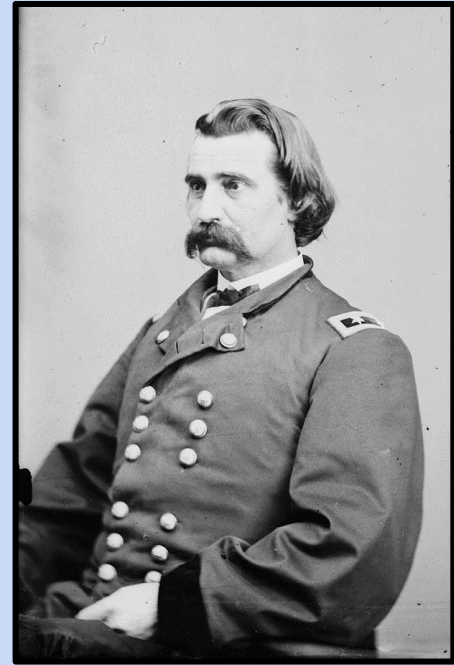
Former Union General

Leader of “Grand Army of the Republic”

May 5, 1868 – Called for nationwide day of remembrance

May 30th – A day to honor those who died in the Civil War

Originally called Decoration Day



# First National Decoration Day

## May 30, 1868

- James Garfield spoke at Arlington National Cemetery
- 5,000 people decorated the graves of the 20,000 Civil War soldiers (North and South) buried there
- Spurred Northern states to hold events – By 1890 each one had made Decoration Day an official state holiday
- Southern states continued to honor their Civil War dead on separate days...



# Confederate Decoration Day

Southern states continued to honor their war dead on separate days – Tradition continues today:

Florida, Georgia, Alabama– 4th Monday in April

Mississippi – last Monday in April

South Carolina and North Carolina – May 10

Tennessee – June 3

Post-World War I changes us...





# Post-World War I

Decoration Day/Memorial Day gradually becomes a true national holiday

Entire country, both North and South, commemorate by graves honoring those all soldiers killed during all US wars on May 30





# Memorial Day Today

1971 – Uniform Monday Holiday Act – Last Monday of May and a federal holiday



# National Monument Requirement Act of 2000

“National Moment of Remembrance” to reclaim Memorial Day as the noble event it was intended to be, to honor those who died in service to our nation.

3 pm for 1 minute – gather informally remember in silence or during “Taps”

To demonstrate gratitude, remind us of sacrifices, opportunity to unite symbolically, make Memorial Day relevant

History: 1996 children touring Lafayette Park in Washington DC when asked what Memorial Day meant and they responded... “That’s the day the pool opens!”

# What FBCC does for Memorial Day

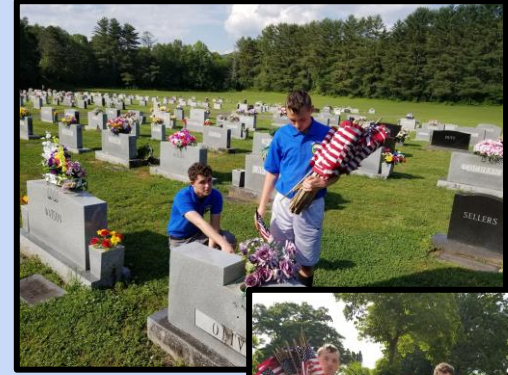
Past: JROTC cadets placed flags on graves of veterans at BC, Swain Memorial, and Lauada Cemeteries

Today: FBCC ensures flags are placed at same cemeteries

Catalogued 110 Civil War through Vietnam War veterans buried in BC Cemetery

Additionally: Placed flags on graves at \_\_\_\_\_

Don working record of veterans buried in other Swain cemeteries including those in GSMNP



## Items of Note

- History of wearing poppies – Flanders Fields Poem
- Many towns claim to be first – Waterloo, NY recognized by Congress in 1966 as first official Memorial Day
- Flag Etiquette – Raise flag briskly, lower to half mast. Hold until noon, then raise to full staff for remaining day



# Two BC Cemetery Internees Stories

Jim Sneed and Bob Sherrill



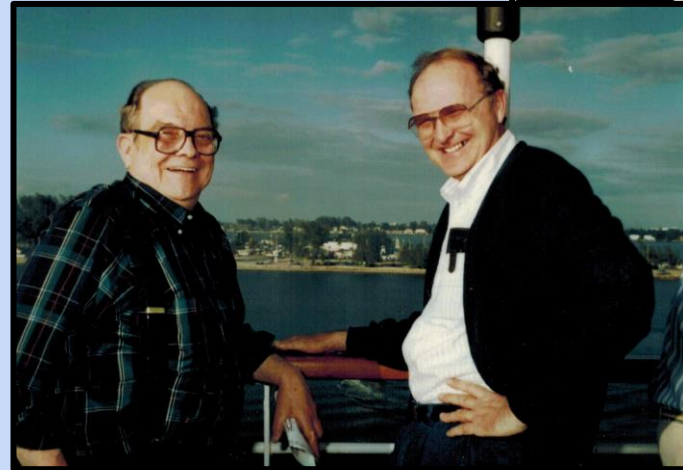
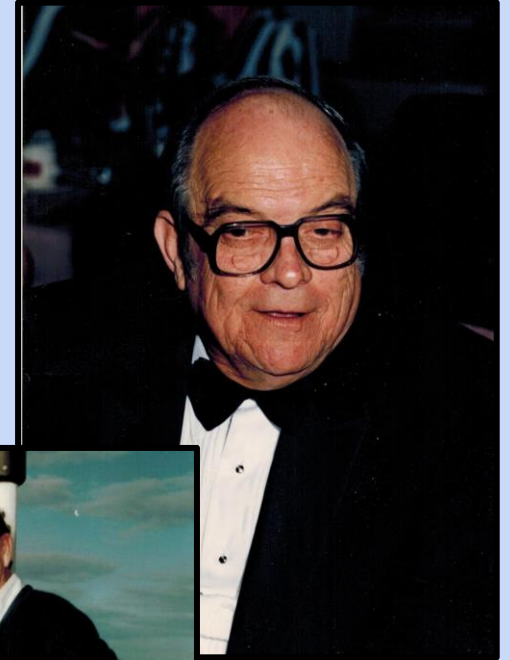
# Jim Sneed

Born: Dec 13, 1924

Died: Jan 20, 1999

Interred: Bryson City Cemetery

Spouse: Jeanne





# Jim Sneed – Military Service

Enlisted in the US Marines at Columbia,  
SC in 1943 at 18 years old

Basic Training at Camp Lejuene, NC

Discharged 6 May 1946

Served with the 3rd Fleet US Navy, WWII,  
Okinawa as a Marine lineman

“He didn’t talk much about his time in the  
Marines” – Jeanne Sneed



# Okinawa – April 1 - June 22, 1945

- Brutal Fighting – Japanese defending a home island
- Knew it was a lost cause but wanted to inflict as many American casualties as possible
- Many fought to the death or committed suicide



# Okinawa – Jim's Story

- Served in Okinawa-area Jan 11, 1945 to Dec 26, 1946
- Not part of the initial invasion – still had one of the most dangerous jobs on the island – Lineman



Note: Pictures are representative of Jim Sneed's action at Okinawa

# Okinawa – Jim's Story

- Told stories of sand fleas – attacking and biting soldiers on island – leaving welts
- Marines would strip and run into ocean to seek relief from bites
- Jim spoke of Japanese soldiers knocking teeth out of bodies of dead American to retrieve the gold

CERTIFIED COPY OF  
United States Marine Corps  
SERIES A

**Honorably Discharge**  
THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT

James Critchlow Sneed A Sergeant  
IS HONORABLY DISCHARGED FROM THE Marine Corps Separation Unit one 9048  
AND FROM THE UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS. THIS 28th DAY OF April, 1946

THIS CERTIFICATE IS AWARDED AS A TESTIMONIAL OF FIDELITY AND OBEEDIENCE  
DURING SERVICE, ON 5 Jun 45  
Enlisted by me this date in the U.S. Marine Corps. Rank: Pvt. Branch: Lt. I. Bol. U.S.M.C.  
Service Reserve (Enlisted) 18 years for three years. Corp. Johnson. In. No. 3886

Enlisted at: CHINA, Columbia S.C. on the 19th day of July, 1943. to serve. Div. S.S. 1st  
Rank: 15 December 1944 at Bryson City, S.C.

WARS ENLISTED WAR: None. HONORARY WAR WITH: None. FROM: None. TO: None  
DAYS FROM: Daily. CITY: None. STATE: None

PREVIOUS SERVICE: None

RANK AND TYPE OF WARRANT AT TIME OF DISCHARGE: Sergeant - Avn. Temp. 15 Aug 45  
WEAPONS QUALIFICATION: Rifle Marksmen - score of 288-10 Sept 45

SPECIAL MILITARY QUALIFICATIONS: Field Linesman - SS 541

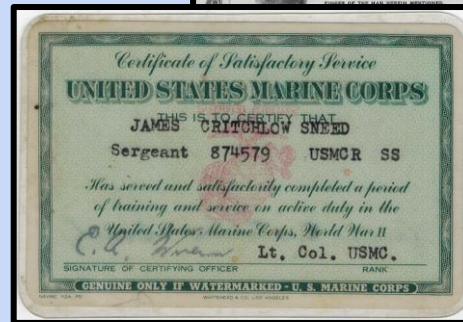
SERVICE AREA AND PERIOD: Central Pacific Area from 11 Jan 45 to 26 Feb 45

WOUNDS RECEIVED IN SERVICE: None  
BATTLE OR OTHER HONORABLE EXPEDITION: Participated in the Okinawa campaign and the Third Fleet Operations against Japan.

REMARKS: Authority for discharge, Art. 5-15 MCM. Issued Certificate of Satisfactory Service; issued 2 patches, blue; 2 patches, green; honorable service, issued honorable service number and this honorable service discharge book. Good Conduct Medal. Period of absence 29 July 45. S.C. Hammond Jr.

SERIAL NUMBER: 874579 S.C. Hammond Jr. 30 Jan. U.S.M.C.

IS POTENTIALLY QUALIFIED FOR DISCHARGE. REQUIRES FURTHER TREATMENT OR HOSPITALIZATION.  
I CERTIFY THIS IS THE ACCURATE COPY OF THE ABOVE INFO.  
DATE: 11/11/2011



# After the War – Jim’s Story

- Came home to Bryson City in 1946
- Worked at family restaurant on Main Street in Bryson City – Met Jeanne
- Worked at and finally purchased Na-bors Restaurant
- Located near Darnell Farms
- Just completed inventory of equipment and the building burned
- Rebuilt restaurant in the location its at today
- Part of the attraction was peafowl that the Sneeds kept by the river





# Sneed's Restaurant, 1960s



# Bob Sherrill

Born: Feb 12, 1929

Died: Sep 2, 2016

Interred: Bryson City Cemetery

Spouse: Mary Leah

US Air Force

Served in Korea and Vietnam

# Bob Sherrill – Military Service

- Enlisted in the Air Force about three years out of high school
- Served in Korea a Electronic Countermeasures Technician onboard B-29 Superfortresses
- Discharged after four years
- After coming back to Bryson City, decided to re-join the USAF
- Years in service – Oct 1947 - June 1969
- During one Mission... Bombs rolling around...



# Korean War

- War to push Communist North Korea and China out of South Korea
- 2,714 aircraft lost, 1180 Airman killed in action



# Bob's Service History

- After Korea –
- Around the country and the world as Crypto Operator and Military Training Instructor
- Served in Barksdale AFB, LA, bases in Florida, the Pentagon, United Kingdom, and Vietnam



# Bob's Service History – Medals and Awards

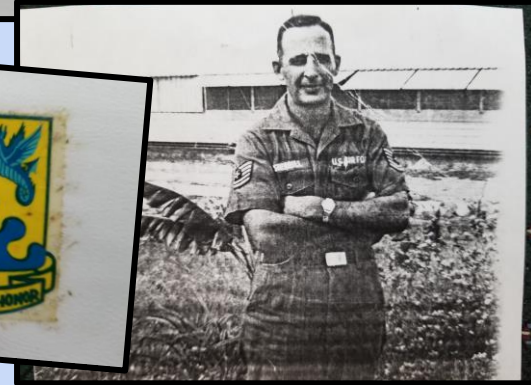
Bronze Star  
Air Medal w/ 5 Bronze OLC  
Joint Service Commendation Medal  
Presidential Unit Citation  
Air Force Good Conduct Medal w/ 1 OLC  
Good Conduct Medal with Bronze Clasp, 4 Loops  
National Defense Service Medal with 1 Bronze Service Star  
Korean Service Medal  
Vietnam Service Medal  
Air Force Longevity Service Award Ribbon with 3 OLC  
Small Arms Expert Marksmanship  
Republic of Korea Presidential Unit Citation  
United Nations Service Medal  
Republic of Vietnam Campaign Medal





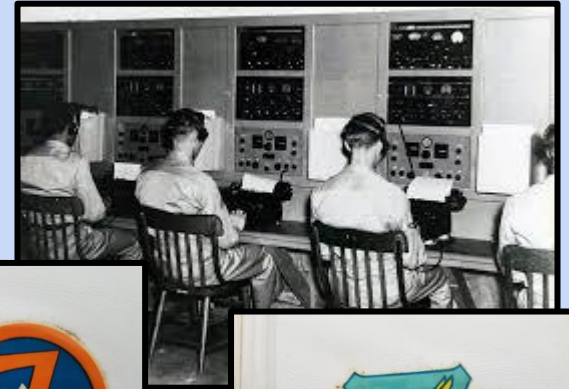
# Bob's 20-Plus Year Career

- Bob had a hand in keeping the USSR at bay
- As Cryptologist – Listened to classified eavesdropping messages and typed them out
- This information is sent up to intel to determine what the USSR military was up to.



# Anecdotes from Bob's Career

- HATED his tour in the Pentagon
- Serving as Military Training Instructor
- Challenging to teach “entitled” students from allied countries
- But this job saved him in Vietnam – almost had to walk to his post



# Anecdotes from Bob's Career

- Five children while in the military
- Family emergencies without Bob
- Daughter fell and hurt head
- Return from Vietnam was not met as a hero— like many service members he was disrespected upon entry to the US
- Retired as a Technical Sergeant



# After the Military...

- Bob settled down with Mary Leah in Bryson City
- Found a calling to serve his faith and became a pastor
- This took him to Virginia, Kentucky and finally back to Bryson City



# Jim Sneed and Bob Sherrill

Their Service Represents the Many Men a Women Who  
Have Sacrificed for This Nation



Thank You