

GUEST

Why Flag Day matters

BY TOM PURCELL

Flag Day, celebrated every June 14, is one of America's lesser-known holidays, but my father never forgot it.

June 14 marks the day in 1777 when the Continental Congress officially adopted the Stars and Stripes as our national flag. Though President Woodrow Wilson established Flag Day by proclamation in 1916, it wasn't made permanent until 1949, when President Harry S. Truman signed it into law.



For my father, born during the Great Depression, Flag Day was never just a footnote.

We got him a tall flagpole for his 65th birthday, shortly after he and my mother moved into a new house. He mounted it in concrete at the center of his long front yard. He maintained many flags over the years, replacing them as needed – until three years ago, when, at 89, he passed away.

As a boy, he grew up in a country rallying to defeat mighty foes in World War II. Drafted at the tail end of the Korean War, he served for two years. When he returned home, America was a place full of optimism and promise.

He and my mother married and raised six children. He worked hard for decades at the phone company and retired just shy of 60.

He ended up enjoying retirement for more than 30 years – something he never imagined. He once told me he didn't expect to live past 70, let alone nearly 90. And he never expected to enjoy all of the material blessings he had.

He loved his country not because it was perfect – we've made many missteps in our history – but because it was always striving to improve. To my dad, the flag was a symbol of our constant striving.

In his view, America is exceptional because its people are free to speak, worship, create and build as they pursue their own happiness.

But somewhere along the line, the flag has become divisive in some circles – as though honoring it means ignoring our flaws or endorsing a particular political agenda.

My father knew that the opposite was true. He knew that preserving our freedoms requires vigilance and respect from every generation.

When he was young, people stood still when the national anthem played. Hats came off. Hands covered hearts. Nobody giggled through it. Nobody scrolled.

Now, too often, people are distracted – unaware of what the flag truly symbolizes.

In today's divided times, we could use more subtle reminders of what unites us. The flag should be one of those reminders – not of politics, but of principles: freedom, responsibility, shared purpose and a continuous desire to improve.

I admit I never thought much about the flag when I was younger. It was just there – something I saluted by rote in school or saw at parades.

But over the years, as I watched my father quietly care for his flagpole and replace each worn flag with reverence, I began to understand what it meant.

My father taught me that patriotism isn't about loud declarations – it's about quiet gratitude, responsibility and doing your small part.

I am 63, nearly the age he was when we gave him that flagpole. It's my turn to carry on.

I'm going to mix some concrete this weekend to erect a flagpole in my front yard – a pole that will proudly display the flag I inherited from my father three years ago.

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See Tom Purcell's syndicated column, humor books and funny videos featuring his dog, Thurber, at TomPurcell.com. Email him at Tom@TomPurcell.com.

BY MARVIN BAKER

It's nearly impossible to get precise numbers of people who were either exposed to Agent Orange, or who have had complications because a parent was exposed to it.

What we do know is that North Dakota has approximately 15,000 Vietnam veterans and roughly 65% of them are receiving compensation after being exposed to the defoliant in Southeast Asia. We've also learned from the Veteran's Administration there are approximately 70 women in the state who couldn't have children because of exposure to Agent Orange.



We've all heard of Agent Orange, a chemical defoliant that was used to clear vast areas of jungle in Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos. It's actually been around since the late 1940s and was used most often to clear vegetation from railroad rights of way before the war.

But it gained notoriety when people who came home from Vietnam began getting illnesses that in the beginning couldn't be explained until those illnesses and diseases were linked to the defoliant.

As it turns out, Agent Orange, by definition, is equal parts of what were once two common agricultural chemicals in North Dakota. One of them, 2-4-D, remains a common ag chemical. The other, 2-4-5-T was a brush killer that was outlawed in 1971 except for use on rice acreage, but was banned outright in 1985.

The mixture of these two products creates a byproduct called 2,3,7,8-tetrachlorodibenzo-p-dioxin (TCDD), a

highly toxic carcinogen. There were actually a number of herbicides used in Vietnam, called the rainbow herbicides, that created the dioxin.

According to the Cleveland Clinic, 3.8 million americans who served in Vietnam, may have been exposed to Agent Orange. As many as 400,000 Vietnamese died or had permanent injury from the defoliant.

There are as many as 17 complications from Agent Orange including several types of cancer, fibromyalgia and fertility issues. But what has become more impactful more recently is that children of Vietnam veterans are turning up with issues indirectly related to Agent Orange. If that isn't enough, it is documented that some grandchildren are also affected.

According to the VA, children of Vietnam veterans have been reported to experience a range of health issues that include birth defects, developmental problems and increased risk of certain cancers.

More specifically, those issues include spina bifida, cleft lip and palate, heart defects and limb deformities. Those children may have also experienced learning disabilities, attention and behavioral disorders and developmental delays.

The VA recognizes spina bifida in the children of veterans with qualifying service in Vietnam or Korea as being associated with Agent Orange exposure. The VA offers benefits to children with certain birth defects who are the biological children of Vietnam-era veterans with qualifying service in Vietnam and Korea. The benefits include compensation, health care and vocational training.

What's even more stunning is that grandchildren of those exposed to Agent Orange are turning up with

birth defects. Although the National Academy of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine says there is no direct evidence of this happening, there's a growing awareness of potential intergenerational effects of exposure. Again, spina bifida seems to be the most likely link, but there are other known issues such as being born without eye sockets or having too many fingers and toes.

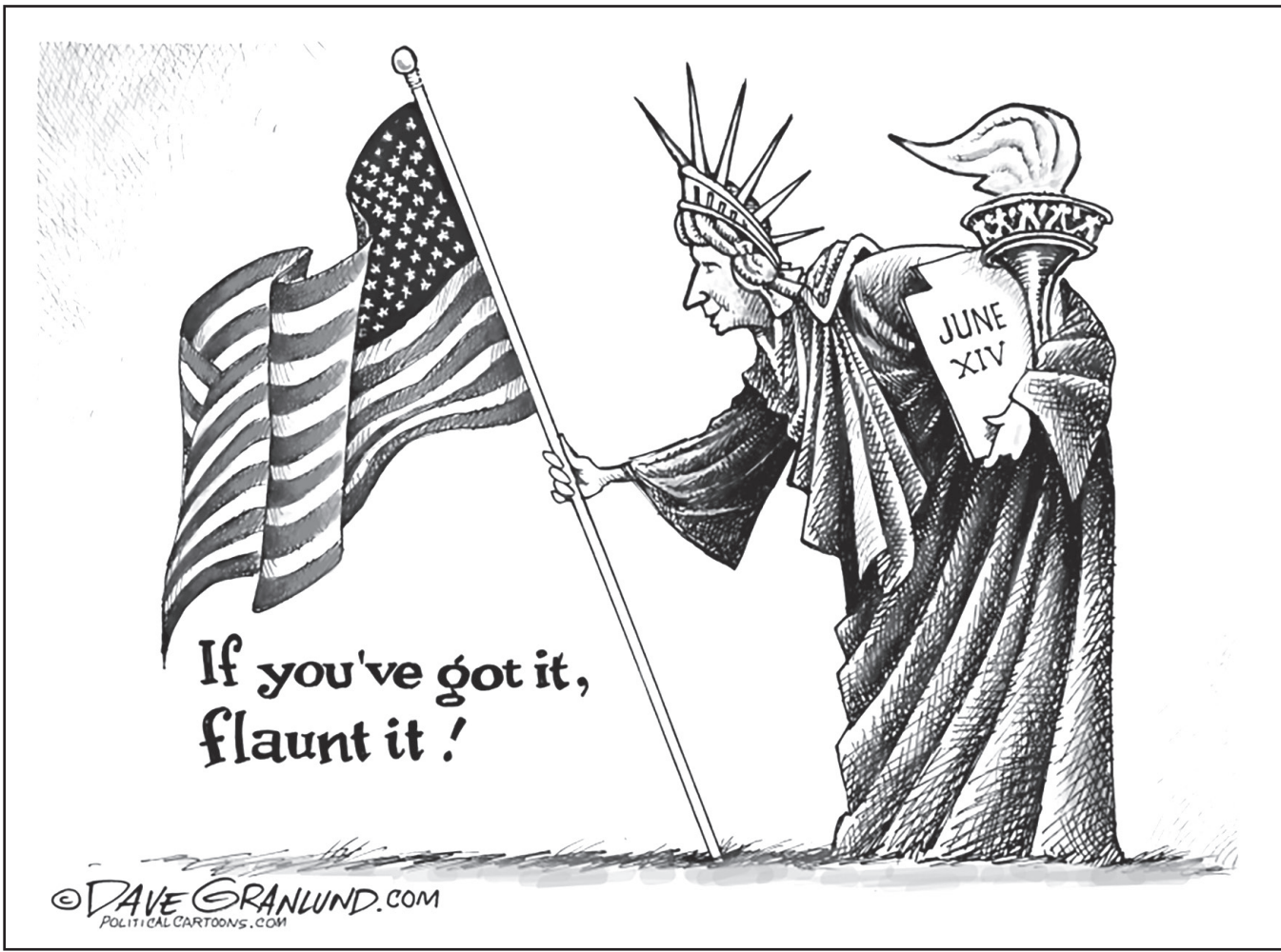
The Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA) suggest that if you believe your child or grandchild has a health issue that may be linked to your exposure, have them file a claim with the assistance of an accredited Veterans Services officer.

The VVA expects the claims to be denied, but the important thing is to get them registered in the VA system. It is also a good idea, according to VVA, to register with Birth Defect Research for Children. This is a non-profit that has been tracking the health of children and grandchildren of Vietnam veterans.

There remain numerous veterans who were either in Vietnam or who were on ships docked in Vietnamese ports who aren't being compensated for their exposure to Agent Orange. At least the VA has acknowledged 17 health effects from the defoliant and some children, especially those with spina bifida, are being compensated.

To learn more about Agent Orange, go to (www.publichealth.va.gov). There's a wealth of information on that website that includes exposure aboard the C-123 airplanes that applied Agent Orange.

Marvin Baker is a news writer for the Kenmare News and formerly Foster County Independent.



UPSIDE DOWN UNDER

The lingering effects of Agent Orange

Need a recent copy of the
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– Weekly Crossword –

CLUES ACROSS

- 1. Racquet sports association
- 4. Places to sleep
- 8. Native American tribe
- 10. Small platforms
- 11. Egg shape
- 12. Running out
- 13. French painter
- 15. Some are "of the Caribbean"
- 16. Painful intestinal problem
- 17. More irritated
- 18. Prove yourself
- 21. Catch
- 22. Supplement with difficulty
- 23. American automotive giant
- 24. Form of "to be"
- 25. Boxing's GOAT
- 26. Peyton's little brother

- 27. Eli's big brother

- 34. Capable of producing
- 35. Reproductive structures in fungi
- 36. Allowed to go forward
- 37. Smiles
- 38. Arteries
- 39. VVV
- 40. Win a series without losing a game
- 41. This (Spanish)
- 42. Opposites of beginnings
- 43. Germanic mythological god

CLUES DOWN

- 1. Consisting of uncombined atoms
- 2. Island country
- 3. Heavenly body
- 4. Caribbean island
- 5. Copyread

- 6. A place to eat
- 7. Drops down
- 9. Native group of Alaska
- 10. Engage in
- 12. "Desperate Housewives" lane
- 14. Thyroid-stimulating hormone
- 15. Foot (Latin)
- 17. A place to bathe
- 19. Animosities
- 20. Partner to cheese
- 23. Venus __, plant
- 24. A donation
- 25. Pokes holes in the ground
- 26. Midway between northeast and east
- 27. Looked into
- 28. Not young
- 29. Annoy constantly
- 30. Something one can strike

- 31. Most glacial
- 32. Ten less than one hundred
- 33. Idle talker
- 34. Has moved through the air
- 36. Container for shipping

Weekly Crossword Answers June 2, 2025														
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