

A Look Back At the Tri-State Chapter of the 34th Infantry Division Association

The last reunion of the Tri-State Chapter was in July of 2012, in Philadelphia. The three WWII veterans attending the reunion made the decision that it was time to close the Chapter.



Frank Day, Erwin Gibson, and seated, Ed Hess Sr.

In attendance with the above veterans were friends, and family members of current and deceased veterans of the 34th Infantry Division.



Back Row L to R, R. Phillips, D. Phillips, S. Tennant, E. Hess Jr, D. Andrews, F. Day, R. Gaynor, M. McKeithen, E. Gibson. Seated L to R, S. Tennant , J. Tennant, R. Hess, E. Hess Sr., M. Andrews, J. Gibson

All of us attending this reunion reached the same conclusion, that it was time to close the chapter. Many WWII veterans have reached the point in their lives where health issues have made it increasingly difficult for them to travel without assistance and attend reunions. The Tri-State Chapter was founded on January 26, 1974 at the Revere House, Glass City Motel, in Toledo, Ohio. The Chapter was made up of veterans from Ohio, Michigan, and Indiana, but as the Chapter grew, the members would come from the west coast, mid-west states, and the east coast of the United States. The 34th Infantry Division National approved the petition for charter at the National Reunion in September, 1974 in Chicago, Illinois. The first President was John Bundy. Gilbert White was a two year Trustee in 1974, and I had the opportunity to get to know Mr. White while attending my first reunion in 2005 at Carlisle, Pennsylvania.

Final Roll Call

Henry G. Bedinger

Kenneth Castor

Albert Ciccone

Paul Daniel

Philip Daurio

Rodney V. Hayden

Walter Havran

John C. Hoffman

Walden Johnson

Joseph Kolakawaki

Orlando Langenfeld

Leighton McKeithen

Robert Meyer

Gene Pfeifer

Horace Reeve

Arthur Sherman

Charles F. Sweeney

Charles Thackara

Col Richard Wilkinson

May they have
no more hills to climb,
nor cold, nor rain, nor mud,
nor enemy fire,
and may they rest in peace.

Since the last Reunion in 2012, nineteen Tri-State members have passed away. An AP story recently discussed the diminishing numbers of WWII veterans, the head line read, "As WWII veterans dwindle, so the reunions" In 1945, 16 million veterans returned home from the war, according to the Department of Veterans Affairs, there is just a little over a million today.



Tri-State Chaplain Emeritus
Leighton McKeithen, Jr. 1925 - 2013

Leighton McKeithen Interview with PBS UNC-TV, “North Carolina’s WWII Experience”.

Question: How do you think World War II affected you?

Leighton McKeithen: *“You have asked a question very important to me, and I have tried to decide, did I gain or did I lose? I had some experiences that told me what the bonds of friendship can be among fellas you’re killing or you’re dying with and so forth, or I know a lot more profanity than I used to know. I showed myself that I was a stronger man than I thought I was, but what did I gain by that?”*

Perhaps the greatest thing was in visiting those homes, because I saw gratitude in those people whose sorrow had broken their hearts and yet they thanked me and hugged me and all of that for caring enough to come, and I guess there was a little bit of profit in it.” [LAUGHS]

Question: What do you want young children to know about why World War II is important?

Leighton McKeithen: *“Well, I don’t know. I’ve been asked to write my experiences down, but I don’t want them to have to read those terrible things. I do wish they had more of a sense of debtorship toward, not toward me but toward a country that fought for itself with high principles, and that’s about all.”* For the interview go to <http://wwii.unctv.org/leighton-mckeithen>.

Walter Nortowski Interview with Emilio Menchini at the 2010 Tri-State Reunion.

In 2010, Emilio Menchini from England and Bill McKinley from Tennessee attended the reunion at Carlisle to produce a documentary on the 34th Division. Walter Nortowski of M company, 133rd regiment, was one of the RedBulls who was featured in the documentary, “Redbulls Remembered”. Walter Nortowski’s experience at Cassino:



“ We carried ammunition all night and all day and it was raining, and, so we went into a little home that was there, and it had a slate roof, and we were crouched in there, and they were shelling us, an the shell hit the slate roof, and came in, and exploded. Good thing I had my helmet on, a piece of shrapnel about ¾ in came thru the helmet, liner, cut the straps, hit me in the head and rolled down my shoulder”. Walt did not pursue a purple heart he said, “ I went through a lot of shit; let them keep it! I’ m no hero, I just wanted to

make it home”.

Memorial Brick Placed in Front of the **Army Heritage Center**, Carlisle, PA Honoring the soldiers of the 34th Infantry Division.



Tri-State Reunion Photos from 2005 to 2012.



L to R, Walter Nortowski, Frank Day, ?, Erwin Gibson, Charles Hastings, John Minotti, Clark Lease, Jim Dubellis, ?, Sgt D. Loback



L to R, Carolyn White, Marion Rudolph, Gilbert White, Philip Daurio



L to R, R. Hess, Kermit & Jean Laidig, D. Cramer



L to R, Marion & Ray Rudolph, Don Rogers



Martin Winkle



L to R, Alma Taylor, Marion Rudolph & Ray Rudolph, John & Ann Minotti, ?, Edna McKeithen, John Taylor



L to R, Kermit Laidig, Bill & Eleanor Bennett, Jean Laidig



L to R, Master Sgt. Tom Busby, Larry Lewer, Clark Lease



left top: Frank Day
 Dan Andrews
 Marilyn Andrews
 Ed Hess Jr.
 Ed Hess
 Richard Hess

Right top: Erwin Gibson
 Joe Gibson
 Dale Phillips
 Rebecca Phillips
 Madge McKeithen
 Richard Gaynor



Joe Gibson, Red Bull Banner, Erwin Gibson

Tri-State Treasury.

Marilyn and I attended the National Reunion in October of 2012. While there, Col(Ret) Russ Bierl, Secretary, and Col Ronald Albrecht, President of the 34th Infantry Division Association, presented a plan to close out the Tri-State treasury. As of February 2, 2013, the Tri-State treasury held \$7,165.

The treasury was divided into 5 accounts:

- \$1,641 directed toward a Memorial Fund for the placement of wreaths in the National Cemeteries in Italy and Tunisia
- \$1,641 toward membership
- \$1,641 toward the National newsletter
- \$1,641 Tri-State Donation to the Wounded Warriors Project
- \$ 600 was set aside for printing and mailing of this last Tri-State document

Minutes from the Last Reunion in 2012.

The Tri-State Chapter met for the last time in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in July, 2012.

In Attendance at this meeting were as follows:

Mr. Irwin Gibson- Veteran and his wife, Jo
Mr. Frank Day-Veteran
Mr. Edward Hess, Sr. Veteran
Edward Hess, Jr., Vice President
Richard Hess
Rebecca Snyder Phillips
Dale Phillips
Lou Ann Helder-Daughter of Wilmer Murray (Friday night only)
Madge McKeithen-Daughter of Leighton McKeithen
Richard Gaynor-a friend of Madge's
Steve Tennant, Treasurer
Jacque Tennant, Chaplain
Sara Tennant. (Steve's Daughter)
Daniel Andrews, President
Marilyn Andrews. Secretary

Thursday, July 12

Our Reunion took place at the Holiday Inn in the Historic Area of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Most of us arrived during the afternoon of July 12. Madge Mc Keithen and her friend, Richard Gaynor, as well as Jacque, Steve and Sara Tennant joined us on Friday and Lou Ann Helder joined us for Friday's Dinner. After getting settled in our hotel rooms, we socialized in the hotel lobby for the remainder of the afternoon and we also did some sight seeing. The main sites that we visited were located in the Historic Area of Philadelphia. In the evening, we joined together and went to dinner at the Continental Restaurant. The restaurant was located in the Historic Area of the Old City. The restaurant is famous for its "small plates". After dinner, we went back to the hotel for more socialization.

On Friday, July 13

The Tri-State Chapter met at 1:45 p.m. Dan Andrews, President, called the first meeting of the Tri-State Chapter reunion to order. We stood for the Pledge of Allegiance and Jacque Tennant, Chaplain, gave the Benedic-

tion.. Dan called for the secretary's report. The secretary's report was given by Marilyn Andrews. A motion was made by Irwin Gibson and seconded by Edward Hess Jr. to accept the secretary's report. He also asked for the treasures report. Steve reported that there was \$8,526.34 in the treasury. Steve also reported that as of July 13, 2012 there was a total of \$426.81 in expenses. A motion was made and seconded to accept the treasure's report. A discussion followed regarding whether the veterans wanted to have another reunion in 2013. Edward Hess and Irwin Gibson expressed that they were not sure that they could attend another reunion due to their ages and health. After some more discussion it was decided that this would be our last reunion. A second discussion took place regarding what should be done with our treasury as well as our flags and the other equipment that belongs to our chapter. Mr. Hess suggested that some money could go to the Camp Dodge Museum or the Gold Star Mothers, Irwin Gibson, suggested that part of the treasury should go to the Honor Flights. This fund was developed to fly WWII Veterans to visit the WWII Memorial in Washington DC. Irwin said that he just came back from one of the flights two weeks ago, and it was a wonderful experience. Irwin said veterans are not allowed to give to the fund on an individual basis; however the Tri-State Chapter could give a donation. Edward Hess Jr. suggested that perhaps some money could go to the children of the deceased members of the 34th Infantry Division for their education. Or the "Wounded Warrior" Project. Further discussion took place regarding whether the Tri-State Chapter should give money for a memorial at the Museum in Carlisle, Pennsylvania or the one at the National Museum in Iowa. Rebecca said that she feels that it should be primarily the veterans of the Tri-State that decide where the money should go. Rebecca asked if one of the veterans in attendance could call Pat Skelly to find out what organizations we would be allowed to give to. The veterans said that they would like it if Rebecca called Pat as they all have hearing issues, which would make it difficult for them to communicate with Pat. Rebecca agreed to call Pat. Jacque suggested polling all the active members and give them four options as to what charity or charities they want the treasury to be used for. Ed Hess, Jr. suggested calling the members would not give them a chance to think about the options. Instead, he felt that sending a letter to the active members with the options would give them time to decide how they want the treasury to be used. Before sending the letters to the veterans, we need to discuss the options with Pat or one of the officers of the 34th Division, which is the National Organization in Iowa. A deadline was given of October 15th for the veterans to give their options and the results would be published by November 15th. We decided as a group to meet again Saturday after the memorial service to discuss our options further. Dan reminded everyone that we would meet in the hotel lobby to carpool to Maggianos for dinner at 5:00p.m.

Saturday, July 14th

A Memorial Service was held at 10:30. The service included a call to worship, the invocation and the Lord's Prayer, a Hymn, (America the Beautiful) the Memorial Litany. The Memorial Address Hymn (Battle Hymn of the Republic) Benediction and Taps.

After the Memorial Service, Steve, Jacque and Sara had to leave us to attend a friend's wedding. The rest of us met again and discussed what to do with our equipment. It was decided that Dan would take the small flags. Ed Hess and Frank Day also took some flags. Irwin Gibson took the banner. Before she left for the wedding, Jacque suggested we should publish a final newsletter, which everyone agreed should be done. This writer said that we would publish a final newsletter when we have more information regarding how our treasury will be divided. A motion was made and seconded to adjourn the meeting. The rest of the day was spent site seeing or socializing. We decided to meet in the lobby again at 5:00 to go to City Tavern for dinner. When Dan made the reservations, by accident, he gave them the wrong date. However, because we had an early reservation, they were still able to accommodate our group. It was great eating at a restaurant where our forefathers had dined many years ago. All of the waiters and waitresses were in costumes significant of the period.

Sunday, July 15

Some of us ate our breakfast at the hotel before heading out to go home. We were able to say our last goodbyes. Dan and I stayed an extra day to do some site seeing before heading back to New York on Monday.

Closing Statement.

In the spring of 2005, I was looking for information on the 34th Infantry Division, and after searching the internet, I came across Pat Skelly's phone number. I gave Pat a call. During the phone call, he told me to come to the Carlisle reunion that July. I would like to thank Pat for that invitation. As result of that offer, a new venture presented itself to my wife and I. While at the 2005 reunion, we attended the chapter business meeting on Saturday. We sat in the front row, and during the meeting, someone behind us made a funny remark about us, Phil Daurio, who was seated next to me, replied, "Hey it's their first time, give them a break". When we arrived at the Comfort Suites on July 27, 2005, the lobby was filled with Red Hats, and Red Shirts, with Redbull's on them. Forty-one Redbull veterans attended the 2005 reunion, in 2012, there were three, and the comparison speaks volumes. Since my starting point is 2005, I know nothing of the previous thirty-one reunions of the Tri-State Chapter of 34th Infantry Division Association. My impression of the reunions was that the veterans of WWII gathered together to remember those who did not return from North Africa and Italy, to remember those who have passed away since the end of the war, and at the same time have good time.

Being involved in the 34th Infantry Division Association and the Tri-State Chapter, has allowed my wife and I to gain a new perspective on WWII, and the Army. Even more, it has enabled us to make so many friends and go to new places. On behalf of Marilyn and myself, thank you, for this opportunity.

Dan Andrews