



'HELP ME SAVE HER'



Sandra McCall (right) at her daughter Delilah's 2014 Bluestone High School graduation. (Contributed photo)

For Chase City mother, anguish over her daughter's addiction, and a plea for the community

By SUSAN KYTE
Sun Staff Writer

Sitting quietly in the back of a Mecklenburg County courtroom Thursday, Sandra McCall of Chase City waited to hear a judge impose the jail time that her 23-year-old daughter, Delilah, would receive for possession of narcotic drugs.

Delilah is a drug addict who faces up to 10 years in prison for the offense. She's also been charged with making a false statement on a criminal history check, a Class 5 felony that carries a prison sentence of up to 10 years.

The case was continued until May 8 and McCall left the courthouse promising to return the following week. Delilah went back to her cell at Meherrin River Regional Jail, clean and sober for the first time in years.

McCall is on a crusade to save not only her daughter but others like her, whose lives are at risk from addiction to heroin, opioids, cocaine, crystal meth, and less-known drugs such as "pinks" (U47700, a heroin substitute that is eight times as potent as heroin) and "elephants" (carfentanil, a synthetic opioid created as an elephant tranquilizer). She's not the only person in the area dealing with the ravages of drug addiction in the family, but she is more vocal than most.

Amid her frustration that nothing else has worked to save her daughter, McCall offered to tell her story and the tortured tale of Delilah's descent into addiction in the hope that more families will speak out and bring serious attention to the very real drug crisis that exists in Mecklenburg County and across Southside Virginia.

"It's here and it's bad. We just don't talk about it," says McCall.

McCall, a former corrections worker and CNA with certifications from FEMA and as an emergency vehicle operator, says the death count from drug use is greater than Virginia Department of Health official statistics because too often the cause of death is listed as "cardiac arrest" instead of "accidental overdose." In 2017, the last year for which records are reported, the Department of Health reported only seven deaths from drug overdoses across the Southside Virginia Health District — encompassing Brunswick, Halifax and Mecklenburg counties.

Mecklenburg Sheriff Bobby Hawkins says that with widespread use of Narcan, overdose victims don't die; in fact, once revived, they often refuse transport to the hospital. Thus there are no official records of these incidents.

"We've arrested individuals and found Narcan in their drug kits alongside their heroin and needles," said Hawkins. "Now that so many people have access to Narcan, someone in the family may revive another member of the family and not report it" to the police or to health officials.

Still, Hawkins worries about the day when Mecklenburg County may be confronted with news like what happened in

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DELILAH

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Chesterfield County over the weekend, where police responded to six overdoses inside of 24 hours.

Over the past year, McCall says she knows of a dozen families in Mecklenburg County that lost a family member because of drugs. While not all the victims died of an overdose — at least one was murdered, another was a suicide — McCall says the common thread was their involvement in the local drug culture. It's a culture McCall is all too familiar with after the days, months and years she's spent trying to save her daughter from an early death.

Seeing her daughter on Thursday renewed her belief that Delilah can turn her life around. McCall says more than one medical professional has told her to "give up," that her daughter "is a lost cause."

"At least she's alive," McCall says wistfully. "As long as she is in jail, I know she is alive." It is a hard truth, but one McCall has come to accept over the past six years, as she saw her once bright and beautiful daughter spiral deeper and deeper into addiction. The happy, friendly and curious girl who wrote poetry, drew picturesque art, and who wanted to be a veterinarian or psychologist someday has been replaced by an angry, unkempt soul who stares at you from dead eyes and tells you "the best way to die is high," her mother says.

Delilah's drug use began when she was about 17 years old. Her boyfriend at the time offered her pills and marijuana. Delilah chose to consume them. Six years later, McCall says it's no longer a choice but a need. Delilah takes whatever she can find to get high — heroin, crystal meth and pills, sometimes in combination. She once even snorted cinnamon because there were no drugs in the house.

For the longest time, McCall said Delilah showed no signs of addiction, she maintained her physical appearance, she attended school, earned good grades and held a job. She even earned a full scholarship to attend Liberty University upon graduation from Bluestone High School. That all changed as Delilah's drug habit overtook her life. She never went to Liberty, opting instead to take classes at SVCC, but that ended as did the many jobs Delilah held and lost because she would show up too wasted to work or not show up at all.

"You don't know what it's like until you find [your child] with grey lips, nearly unconscious, lying in dog feces and urine, surrounded by filth, rotten food and maggots, living conditions so bad you had to be suited up," says McCall.

She stops short of saying her daughter is safe in jail. "I'm not naïve enough to believe that there are no drugs in prison. As long as she remains there [incarcerated], she's not on the street, and there's medical help right there [at the prison]."

Everyday Delilah is not in jail, McCall says she braces herself for the call she hopes will never come — the one saying "we found your daughter, she died from an overdose." Delilah has almost died three times but was revived each time after receiving Narcan.

Naloxone, better known by the trade name Narcan, is used to rescue or revive a person suffering from an opioid overdose.

Delilah's story is not unique and while the drugs or their potency change over time, the stories remain the same. Getting high becomes the all-consuming aspect of daily life. Nothing and no one else matters.

Tim Gallion has been clean and sober for over 30 years. He remembers as if it was yesterday, his days using heroin and crystal meth. He started snorting "crank" (crystal meth). He did that for a year before moving on to heroin. He describes that first high "as the nearest thing to seeing God." Then you crash, you cry, you shake and can't stop scratching yourself, he explains.

For a while he would do a speedball — a mix of heroin and cocaine — or crystal meth to get ready for work. It would "make me wide open." He recalls repairing railroad tracks, operating a spike pulling machine while high. "I'd be a mile ahead of the others."

At night Gallion said he'd shoot up heroin to "get away from his problems." His addiction got so bad he would shoot ice water into his veins if he had no drugs. Sometimes just the sight of his needle could get him high.

Gallion will tell you from experience that "human beings will sell their souls for drugs even though they know that the drug or some illness contracted because of drug use will very likely kill [them]."

Sandra McCall, Delilah's mother, is battling her own health issues: complications from childhood diabetes, thyroid issues and other more serious health problems that have her living on borrowed time, but she's determined. "If it takes my last breath, I will use it to save my daughter," she vows.

"I've done many things I probably shouldn't have, but I did it for her." She's followed her daughter, called the police on her, searched her houses, rooms, and personal effects, and finally had her locked up.

She wishes that parents and families who are living similar experiences would start speaking out and speaking up. She wants the stigma associated with addiction removed: "We're all in this together."

She believes that only when families of addicts, former addicts, and those on the front line dealing with the addiction crisis unite that elected officials and others with the power and ability to affect change will sit up and listen.

"I got this crazy idea a couple of years ago to have every town [in Mecklenburg County] shut down for a day. All stores and businesses close for a few hours or a day. Then people would see what drugs can do to an area. There would be no grocery store, no place to buy gas, no shops. That's what drugs do to a community; they destroy it." She said she was encouraged by her initial conversations with police and town leaders. "They seemed receptive," but her personal health issues and problems tied to Delilah's troubles prevented her from following through.

Drugs tax the resources of every community. Combined spending for Mecklenburg County agencies on the front lines of the drug crisis — the Sheriff's Office, Piedmont Court Services, the W.W. Moore Juvenile Detention Center in Danville, the Commonwealth Attorney's Office and Department of Social Services — is expected to increase by more than \$500,000 over present-day spending in fiscal year 2018.

Commonwealth's Attorney Allen Nash estimates that upwards of 90 percent of all cases in the criminal justice system are tied to drug use, possession and distribu-



Before Delilah's descent into drug addiction

tion. These are not only the cases involving possession of controlled substances, he says, but also crimes where the charges may be for breaking and entering, larceny, shoplifting, possession of stolen property, or even assault. Often, the underlying cause for these crimes is the need to find money to buy drugs or behaviors from being under the influence of drugs.

Between January and March of 2019, 442 cases were filed in the Mecklenburg County Circuit Court criminal division. That marked a 12 percent increase over the number of criminal cases filed in the same period in 2018. It is, by far, the largest caseload among counties in the 10th Judicial Circuit which includes Appomattox, Buckingham, Charlotte, Cumberland, Halifax, Lunenburg, Mecklenburg and Prince Edward circuit courts. The next highest caseload is in Halifax County, which had 238 criminal cases filed in the first three months of 2019. Across the circuit, most criminal docket cases involve drug-related crimes.

Sandra Gregory, who heads Mecklenburg County's Department of Social Services, says her staff, too, is over-taxed by the drug crisis. On average, DSS case workers remove a dozen or more children from homes and parents each week because of danger to the children from drug users or squalid living conditions that occur when parents or caretakers spend their money on drugs instead of essentials such as cleaning products or food. She estimates that 80 percent of the cases that her office handles have drugs involved.

Many case workers put in 12-hour days to handle their current caseload, says Gregory. She says the county DSS office could use 20 more trained caseworkers to reduce to a manageable level the number of cases each staffer oversees, based on the current influx of new cases involving drugs.

There is also a dire need for family members or other adults who can serve as foster parents for children removed from homes where there are drugs.

McCall knows all too well that addiction is not a one-way street. When a person compulsively uses drugs, their behaviors do not exist in a vacuum. The negative behaviors weigh heavily, and often tragically, on their loved ones. "It's been exceedingly hard to be the mother of an addict," she says.

McCall worries that too often, she and her ex-husband, Delilah's father, and his wife have been enablers for Delilah, cleaning up her messes, moving her from home to home, and paying for food, televisions, and clothes.

It's not only the parents, but every person in an addict's immediate family or extended family who is affected in some way by an individual's substance abuse, whether it is financially, physically or psychologically. Delilah's two younger siblings are mixed in their views of their sister. Her brother does not want Delilah in his life, while her younger sister tries to maintain contact, writing letters and waiting for the day her older sister gets well.

Other consequences that flow from drug abuse — all of which McCall says she and family members experienced with Delilah — include the loss of a relationship as Delilah separated herself from family and friends, facing Delilah's negative mindset, mistrust, dishonesty, evasiveness, and emotional turmoil, and having to become Delilah's caretaker as the toxic burden of the drugs brought on a variety of illnesses and disorders, including a mental health disorder that resulted in her being involuntarily committed to a facility.

McCall says she feels that too much time and attention is spent on "finding someone to blame" for the addiction crisis and not enough on treatment. She points to ongoing news reports of lawsuits against drug manufacturers and the families who own those companies as proof. "I live in the real world. I want solutions to problems, not lawsuits," she says.

She also calls out elected officials for "using the drug crisis for political purposes." She says they offer no real solution to the problem, and inadequate resources for those on the frontline to battle the crisis.

In October 2017 President Donald Trump deemed the opioid crisis "a national health emergency." In the 18 months since, studies such as the one conducted by the Bipartisan Policy Center concluded that there has been too little progress with battling the crisis and that the federal "funding approach lacks long-term vision."

In 2016, then-Virginia Health Commissioner Marissa Levine deemed the opioid addiction crisis a state public health emergency. Two years later, Governor Ralph Northam spent several months touring Virginia and discussing the crisis, but never announced plans to dedicate state resources to the health emergency until September 2018 when he said Virginia received nearly \$16 million in federal grants to combat opioid abuse. That money, which was federal, not state funds, was distributed to regional Community Service Boards (CSB) across the state that used it to expand programs.

In response, McCall asks: What's happened to all the money Virginia received for drug treatment in the past two years?

The Southside Community Service Board (SCSB), which covers Brunswick, Halifax and Mecklenburg counties, used their limited funds to create crisis centers inside VCU Health Community Memorial Hospital in South Hill and Sentara Halifax Regional Hospital in South Boston. There, people who are in mental health crisis can receive initial care while longer-term placements are pursued. The centers also open up access to substance abuse counselors

on a walk-in basis, and they purchase Narcan for first responders.

In McCall's view, there was not enough money earmarked to combat the crisis. None was given to law enforcement and too little, if any, went to the Southside Wellness Coalition, which is working with law enforcement, health and social service officials, community members and others on solutions to the drug and opioid crisis.

On Thursday, 5th District Rep. Denver Riggleman, along with Rep. David Itrone (D-MD), Rep. Mikie Sherrill (D-NJ), and Rep. Kelly Armstrong (R-ND) introduced a bipartisan bill in Congress to authorize an additional \$5 billion in funding for State Opioid Response Grants and Tribal Opioid Response Grants over five years. This bill is only beginning the legislative process. It must be approved by the House and Senate and signed by President Trump before the money will be made available.

While politicians grapple with finding or allocating money for the problem, McCall has a few solutions of her own. First, she said the schools need to reinstitute the DARE program to educate students at an early age about drug use and its negative consequences.

McCall believes the last time DARE was taught in the Mecklenburg County schools was 2013.

The DARE (Drug Abuse Resistance Education) program was replaced federally in 2016 by Keepin' It Real (kiR), a program designed by the U.S. Surgeon General. DARE America, the nonprofit organization that administers the program, says kiR is more effective at reducing rates of alcohol, tobacco, and marijuana use and improving discontinuation of use rates. The organization says Keepin' It Real also leads to more realistic perceptions of peer use, while also improving relationship skills, self-awareness, and responsible decision-making.

McCall wants hospitals, medical examiners and others to stop reporting that the cause of overdose deaths is cardiac arrest. "It's an overdose and should be listed as such or as cardiac arrest due to overdose."

Notwithstanding the HIPAA laws that guard patient privacy, McCall believes hospitals and medical clinics should be required to notify law enforcement when a person is being or has been treated for an overdose.

McCall would also like to see legislation focused on funding to increase the number of available treatment facilities. Currently, the nearest inpatient facilities are in Danville, Lynchburg and Williamsburg, and they are either full or too expensive for the addict who often does not have insurance to pay for the stay.

She has not worked out the details of this funding legislation but is aware that last month New York enacted a tax on prescription opioids to cover the cost of treatment and prevention. Ten other states are eyeing similar legislation, according to Kaiser Health News: California, Delaware, Iowa, Kentucky, Maine, Massachusetts, Montana, New Jersey, Tennessee and Vermont.

McCall would also like the legislature to consider a law that would allow a competent parent or guardian of an addict, regardless of the addict's age or emancipation status, to request and have a court order treatment for the addict either in addition to or in lieu of jail time. "They're [the addict] not in their right mind, so how can they be expected to make decisions about whether to go to treatment?" she asks.

She is also working with Jennifer Winstead to create a Nar-Anon support group for families and friends of addicts. Their goal is to offer a "safe" place to meet and talk with others who are facing the same issues. They also hope identify resources family members can use to create a healthy lifestyle for themselves.

On May 8, McCall will be back with her daughter again in Mecklenburg County Circuit Court, where she hopes to talk about Delilah and let her know about a letter she sent to the court in February. It reads:

"I am writing this letter on behalf of my daughter Delilah McCall. I'm writing this as my last hope and effort to get my daughter some help. For the last 6 years we have been in a battle to save her from herself and using drugs. As a mother I have seen things I pray no mother would have to. My wonderful smart beautiful child has turned into a drugie someone who can't live or cope with life without it.

"I was diagnosed a couple of years ago with a fatal illness. I thought that was a disaster but the entire time, knowing my days are numbered, I have had to sit back and watch my 23-year old's life slip away from us. She's dying from this stuff. So, in all honesty, she's the sicker one. I can't lose my child.

"I have begged for people to help me save her because she doesn't want to save herself. I'm the bad parent because I can't let this drug addiction take her from me. I just can't. This has ruined everything in our relationship. Her ability to light up a room has turned into 'ugh! I hope she's not in the same room with us.' Her smartness, her beauty, her willingness to live and thrive is gone. It's ruined everything.

"At first it [taking drugs] was her choice. Now it's turned into she has no choice but to use to get through the day. This is the cruelest reality a mother can face watching this person fade away daily.

"Jail is not ideal. No parent wants that but the only do you do when she won't help herself? This is the only option.

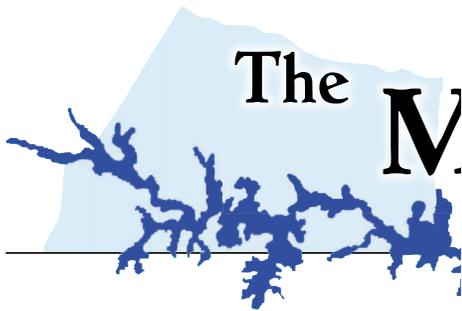
At least this way I know where her head lays. I know her roomie won't be someone having sex with her while she's high. At least I know she will not be found grey like I have found her, clinging on to life. Jail is the only way I have left to save the daughter that left me 6 years ago and will never completely return.

"So, I beg the Courts and anyone who will listen help me save her because she has no desire to save herself from drugs and this dangerous life.

"I can't bury my child — she's supposed to bury me please help me please."

The Chase City Senior Citizens Quilting Class & Bible Study will be held on Tuesday, May 14. This class is held every second and fourth Tuesday at the Senior Citizens Building. Quilting from 2:00 p.m. until 4:00 p.m. Bible study from 4:00 p.m. until 6:00 p.m. For more information on quilting, please contact Sister Gayle Barnette at (434) 372-3368. For more information on Bible Study contact Pastor Rosa Smith (434) 210-6007.

Clarksville VFW Post #1615 will be having a Yard Sale at the VFW Post Home, located on Hwy 15N in Clarksville on Memorial Day Weekend, Saturday May 25, from 8:00 a.m. – Until Vendors wanted! (There will be a table charge) For more information call (434) 210-0397.



'IT'S OK TO BE NOT OK'



Teens in crisis, and students who care
With rising level of suicides, peer group steps into a tragic breach

By SUSAN KYTE
Sun Staff Writer

In the past two years, four teens and two young adults in Mecklenburg County have taken their own lives.

The most recent suicides occurred in the past week, involving two teens, one boy and one girl, at Park View High School. Their deaths were not due to drug use or abuse.

Suicide is now thought to be the second leading cause of death for Americans between the ages of 10 and 34.

For a group of students at Bluestone High School that make up a peer group, Baron Minds Matter, grim statistics pale against the emotional impact of the tragedies themselves.

The Journal of American Medicine reports that the youth suicide rate has risen to 14.6 per 100,000, while the Centers for Disease Control says that suicide rates in the rural counties are 80 percent higher than in large metropolitan areas. The average American's likelihood of dying by suicide at any given age rose 33 percent between 1999 and 2017.

The Bluestone students in the school peer group are not particularly focused on the litany of factors that mental health professionals say contribute to the increase in reported youth suicides — high rates of depression and anxiety, unprecedented levels of social media use, or the idea that one or more suicide episodes can lead another person to end his or her own life.

In September, Bluestone senior Jane Clare Elliott formed Baron Minds Matter. The peer group now has over 40 members.

Their mission is to change the school's culture and reduce stigma about mental health. They remind their peers as well as the adults with whom they interact that "It's okay not to be okay."

Elliott said she knew there was a problem and wanted to do something for fellow students. "Knowing Kyler" — the son of Donna Lopez, who died by his own hand at age 15 — "drove me to start this group. I talked about it with my friends for a while before deciding how to proceed," she said.

The students reached out to Bluestone Middle School teacher Donna Lopez and Bluestone High School teacher and Athletic Director Justin Kirkland to serve as their advisors. The pair are very familiar with the pain that comes from suicide. Lopez's son Kyler ended his life nearly three years ago and last year Kirkland lost one of his best friends to suicide.

Like these young people, Lopez and Kirkland do not dwell on the "why" behind suicides. Lopez says she can only speculate as to what her son was thinking at the time, and her speculation will not bring him back. Instead she chooses to work with the students of Baron Minds Matter to promote mental health wellness and to reinforce the importance of checking on each other.

She knows that love and kindness alone may not

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SUICIDES

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stop a young person from killing himself or herself. "If love could have saved Kyler, he would not have died," Lopez explains, noting that Kyler was popular among his peers and adored by his family.

Studies have shown that activities that benefit mental health — sleep and in-person interactions with family and friends — are in decline among teens. One way the students in Baron Minds Matter hope to improve teen mental health is by encouraging participation in-group activities and school-wide promotions that increase help-seeking behavior, promote social connectedness, and encourage self-care and healthy habits.

Princess DeGuia, the 11th grade representative on the Baron Minds Matter board, says they also promote wellness apps such as "Not OK." It allows the user to alert friends listed in their contact group when they are struggling. DeGuia said you can add a personal message that will be sent to these friends.

On Wednesday, Nov. 6, students at both Park View and Bluestone High Schools were encouraged to wear blue, the favorite color of the student who died last week. On Thursday, Nov. 7, the students are asked to wear red, the favorite color of the young boy who died over the weekend.

On Nov. 2, with the support of Bluestone High School Principal Magie Wilkerson, club members were able to participate in a Danville awareness walk focused on suicide prevention. Later this month, on Nov. 16, many of these students and their friends will be in Boynton for the second annual Kyler Lopez Memorial Walk. Registration begins at 9:30 a.m. at the trail head for the Tobacco Heritage Trail in Boynton on Washington Street.

The money raised from this walk funds a scholarship for a graduating senior who has played soccer during both the junior and senior year of high school.

After one of their first meetings, the group wrote uplifting messages that were posted on the lockers of every student in the school. "You don't know what other kids go home to so an [unexpected] encouraging word can make their day," said Clare Elliott.

DeGuia said after that day, she received several positive responses from

both teachers and students. Lopez said she was in the school on Tuesday, Nov. 5 and noticed that the post-it notes were still on many of the lockers throughout the school building.

On Sept. 10, National Suicide Prevention Day, student members of Baron Minds Matter shared this message on their social media page:

"Everyday people all over the world are affected by mental illness in some way. The suicide rates have increased by twenty-five percent in the last two decades. One in five adults live with some type of mental health disorder. There are seven billion people that live on this planet, so that means that 1,400,000 people have some underlying issue. These huge numbers should not be overlooked! They should be shared and taught, so that people know that they do not have to struggle alone. Look out for everyone you know. If you know anyone struggling, please make it your mission to look out for them. It's okay to not be okay!!"

The students learned what depression can look like among their peers and say it is often marked by passing episodes of sadness, crankiness and irritability. While parents and teachers might readily dismiss these signs as normal mercurial mood swings, the students say don't ignore the signs. It's not wrong to press them. "We can't bring awareness to something we can't discuss," says Elliott.

Lopez adds that discussing suicide will not cause students to be down or suicidal. "Don't be afraid to ask."

"How many more people do you have to lose before others will wake up to the problem?" DeGuia asks.

The club leaders — Elliott, president, Kellyanne Tyner, treasurer, ninth grade representative Jamison Dahl, 11th grade

representative DeGuia and others — agree that most students may feel more comfortable approaching their peers when in distress. They also agree that it is important for these same young people to have an adult they can turn to for support.

The teens stress that Baron Minds Matter is not just for students, it is open to everyone in the school community. "Students look to adults in time of need, when things are not okay, so the more they [the adults] know the more they can help," says Tyner.

Local mental health professionals at the Southside Community Services Board urge people with suicidal thoughts to seek help by contacting their crisis line, which is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. In Mecklenburg County the number is (434) 738-0154, in Brunswick County the number is (434) 848-4121 and in Halifax County the number is (434) 572-2936. Or someone in crisis can call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at (800) 273-8255.

The group already has attracted outside support and thanks Victoria Messick of Southern Glam who donated \$200 to cover out-of-pocket expenses.

Anyone at Bluestone High School who is interested in joining Baron Minds Matter can contact the Elliott, Tyner, DeGuia or Dahl or the other officers: Vice President Cooper Carter, Secretary Marly Lawson, tenth grade representative Tyra Dennis and the ninth grade representative Meghan Murphy. Or check out their Facebook page, Baron Minds Matter.

Annual Fall Bake Sale at Sentara
Meadowview Terrace will be held on Thursday, November 21 in the Community Room from 10:00 a.m. until 12:00 noon. All proceeds benefit the Activity Department.



Witness to war's worst

After Union Level soldier survived Battle of the Bulge, his next assignment was to stand guard at Nuremberg

By SUSAN KYTE Sun Staff Writer

It was 1944 when Uncle Sam called on John Wesley Jones Jr. to serve his country.

The 97-year-old retired electrician from Union Level said at the time, all he wanted to do was work on planes. Instead he became a witness to some of the most horrific and historic chapters of World War II, among them the Battle of the Bulge and the Nuremberg war crimes tribunals.

Jones had been out of school for about four years, having graduated from Buckhorn in 1939 and the Curtis Wright Technical Institute a year later, before he was drafted into the U.S. Army on July 21, 1944.

He was already working in the aviation industry at the time, building planes and gliders at various factories in California and Maryland. He remembers what it was like living in California in the aftermath of the bombing of Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. "There were blackouts. It was a scary time."

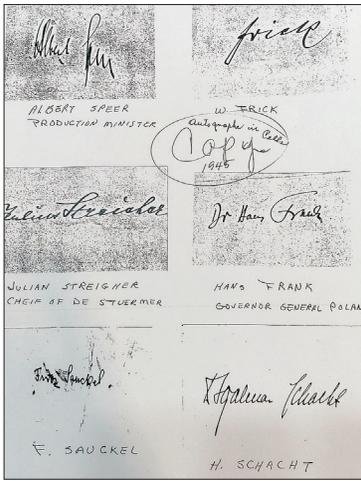
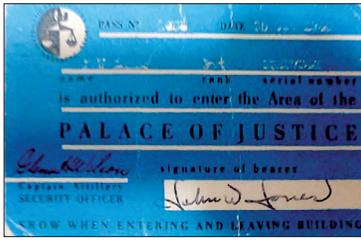
He eventually returned to his home in Virginia and six days later was drafted into the Army.

After completing infantry training in Georgia, Maryland, and New Jersey, Jones and the men of his unit, part of the 358th Regiment of the 90th Infantry Division, boarded the Queen Mary in New York City bound for Scotland. In less than a week they were involved in heavy fighting in Belgium.

Nearly 75 years later, Jones said he still remembers those first days on the battlefield. It was cold and snowy. The men were hunkered down in foxholes with only a blanket for warmth and K-rations for food. The area around them was covered in dense forest, and "we were scared to death."

Jones does not know why, but after being in Belgium for only three days his commanding officer made him an assistant squad leader. Jones protested, telling the CO he did not know if he was qualified. A sharp response came back: "You'll find out in a hurry."

He does acknowledge that he was an expert rifleman, but does not believe that was



At right: John Wesley Jones Jr. today, 97 and living in Union Level, and (below) on leave John Wesley Jones in 1944 on leave before shipping out for Germany in 1944. Top left: Jones' pass to gain access to the Nuremberg trials. The young soldier was assigned to guard Nazi war criminals on trial in the German city. Bottom left, their autographs.

the reason he was chosen to lead. As the division pushed forward through the Bastogne area in the Ardennes Forest of Southeast Belgium, Jones said he and another soldier who would become his best friend for life, Benjamin Crump, were assigned to reconnaissance. They would patrol the nearby woods, collecting intelligence about the enemy. Crump, who was part Cherokee Indian, served as the unit's scout. Jones remembers one particularly deadly battle that took place while he and Crump

were on patrol. There were mortar shells bursting all around them. Somehow the two escaped uninjured. He also recalls the surprise he felt during another recon mission when he and Crump realized the Germans were in retreat, the area was desolate except for the ruts left behind from German tanks as they moved east through the forest toward Germany. Jones did not know it at the time, but his unit was in the midst of a battle now known

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as the Battle of the Bulge. It was the last major German offensive campaign on the Western Front during World War II.

With the enemy on the run, Jones said his unit pushed on into Germany and eventually Czechoslovakia where the 358th Regiment is credited with being the first Allied Regiment to enter that country. They are also credited with liberating at least one concentration camp. But Jones' memories of his time in Czechoslovakia are more mundane.

He remembers staying at a farmhouse in the countryside. The woman who lived there spoke no English, but she would make them cookies. He also recalls heading outside one day in May after hearing planes approaching overhead. As the planes drew near each other, one piloted by a German and the other by an Allied pilot, they dipped their wings and flew past. It was then Jones knew that fighting in Europe was over.

Returning to Vöhrstrass, Germany, Jones said he spent the next two weeks "having a party" with the men of his unit while waiting for his next orders. He assumed he would be going to Japan since the war in the Pacific Theatre was still raging.

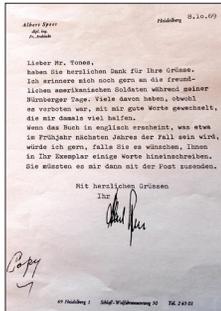
On August 15, 1945 when Emperor Hirohito announced the surrender of Imperial Japan, Jones said he was left to await new orders.

He was reassigned to the 26th Infantry Regiment, 1st Division and his new assignment was to guard war criminals during the Nuremberg trials. Before he left for Nuremberg, Jones said he met and shook hands with General George Patton while the general was on a goodwill tour of troops under his command.

Jones spent the next year watching the trials of Rudolph Hess, Herman Goering, Albert Speer, Alfred Rosenberg, Karl Doenitz, Joachim von Ribbentrop, Fritz Sauckel, Arthur Seyss-Inquart, Hans Frank, Julius Steicher, Hjalmar Schacht, Baron Konstantin von Neurath, and Wilhelm Frick, among others. These former high-ranking officials within the Nazi Party were on trial for war crimes and crimes against human-



John Wesley Jones' Bronze Star and (at right) a letter he received from Albert Speer



The Nuremberg trials were a series of thirteen trials carried out in Nuremberg, Germany, between 1945 and 1949 conducted by an international tribunal made up of representatives from the United States, the Soviet Union, France, and Great Britain. The first and best known of these trials was that of the major war criminals before the International Military Tribunal (IMT), conducted between November 20, 1945 and October 1, 1946.

Of the 24 men tried by the IMT, 19 were convicted and of those 12 were sentenced to death. The remaining seven were handed prison sentences ranging from 10 years to life. Three men were acquitted — one of them being Hjalmar Schacht, who was guarded by Jones.

He said Schacht spoke no English but came off as dignified if not somewhat arrogant. Schacht had been the head of the Reichsbank before the war and an early Economics Minister in Hitler's cabinet. By 1944 he had been imprisoned in a concentration camp by the Nazis.

Jones said he never entered the area where the trials were taking place. His job was to escort the prisoners to and from their cell and walk with them during their daily exercise period. Since he was honor-

ably discharged from the Army before the trials ended, he did not learn of their outcome for some time.

While there, Jones said, "We were under strict orders to not speak with any of them [the prisoners]." That did stop Jones from asking for and receiving autographs from several of those on trial. One of the prisoners was reluctant to sign Jones' autograph book, but Admiral Karl Doenitz eventually relented telling Jones it — his autograph — would be of value someday.

Doenitz was the head of the German Navy and briefly, following Hitler's suicide, president of Germany. He was sentenced to 10 years in prison for his crimes. Upon his release he lived in Hamburg until his death in 1980.

Jones said his most vivid memories are of conversations he had with Hermann Goering, former Commander of the Luftwaffe and original Head of the Gestapo. The two would walk together in the prison yard. "He spoke perfect English and we would often talk about his life in Germany before the war." Even though their conversations were pleasant, Jones said he did not like the man, who he describes as conceited, and was not saddened to hear Goering committed suicide the night before he was to be hanged for his crimes.

Jones does admit to being surprised that Goering had access to a cyanide pill since the prisoners were stripped and searched daily.

While he did not have regular contact with Albert Speer at Nuremberg, he reached out to him in 1969 after Speer's autobiography, "Spandau: The Secret Diaries" was published. Speer wrote back saying he still remembered "quite fondly the friendly American soldiers during my days at Nuremberg. Many of them exchanged kind words with me although it was forbidden, which helped me greatly at that time."

Before the war, Speer was an architect. As a member of Hitler's inner circle, he was named Minister of Armaments and responsible for the use of slave labor — mainly from occupied territories — in the production of armaments. During his trial he expressed repentance for his action and claimed to have been unaware of some of the greater atrocities. He was sentenced to 20 years in prison for his crimes. He died in 1981 while living in London, England.

Exactly two years after he was drafted, Jones said he received an honorable discharge and returned to his home in Union Level. He met and married Bevelyn, his wife of 51 years and together they raised two daughters. While enjoying the life he made with Bevelyn, he never forgot his time in the Army.

He treasured the mementos he collected from that time and in the years since, as well as the medals he earned, a Bronze Star for Meritorious Service in the Battle of the Bulge and a medal for service in occupied Germany — Jones said in his off hours while stationed at Nuremberg, he would sometimes serve as an MP in the town.

He still has copies of his pass authorizing access to the Palace of Justice in Nuremberg where the trials were held, autographs from several prisoners and the letter he received from Albert Speer in 1969. Hanging on the wall above his dining table is a map marking the battle route of the 90th Infantry Division.

Years have passed since Jones spent time with the men tried as Nazi war criminals, but he says time has not diminished his dislike for them or the atrocities they committed against people around the world.

"And for what?" he asks, not expecting an answer.

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