



MEMORIAL DAY

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Senior students receive blessings in baccalaureate

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

Students who attended the Baccalaureate Ceremony for the Towns County High Class of 2024 took the next steps in their life journeys on solid spiritual footing, as the seniors, their families, school officials and church leaders gathered in prayer ahead of graduation on Friday, May 24.

The baccalaureate occurred on Sunday, May 19, at McConnell Baptist Church. Graduating seniors sat in the first several rows of pews while parents and supporters filled in around them, proudly observing as the students absorbed the Biblical messages on offer.

McConnell Lead Pastor Steve Taylor welcomed the guests, and senior Breelan Sieveking provided the opening prayer, thanking God and

asking that He “give us the confidence we need to continue to follow you on this next chapter.”

Three seniors then took to the sanctuary stage to perform moving renditions of “Amazing Grace (My Chains Are Gone),” “Can’t Even Walk,” and “I’ll Fly Away,” with Stone Chauncey and Brady McConnell on guitar and vocals, and Tanner Cunningham providing additional vocals.

Senior Connor Chastain prayed that he and his classmates receive prosperity, guidance and protection from God, and that they give glory to Him in all that they do following graduation.

Macedonia Baptist Church Youth Pastor Donnie Jarrard, who is retiring from his School Resource Officer position after 12 years, ad-

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Everyone joined in to pray for Class of 2024 seniors at the end of the May 19 Baccalaureate Ceremony at McConnell Baptist Church. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

TCHS prepares grads with Senior Honors Day



Congratulations to TCHS Class of 2024 Valedictorian Dhriti Patel, Salutatorian Eli Phillips and Historian Brant Youngblood, as announced in the May 17 Senior Honors Day. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

By Brittany Holbrooks
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

The Towns County High School Class of 2024 inched one step closer to graduation with the celebration of Senior

Honors Day on Friday, May 17.

A total of 73 students lauded that day as a “highly decorated” group, the seniors gathered inside the Anne Oliver Mitchell Auditorium on

campus to receive scholarships, cords and stoles before adoring family and friends.

Some of those scholarships were awarded by local businesses and other organi-

See TCHS Senior Honors, Page 7

Memorial Day ceremony to honor America’s fallen

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

On Monday, May 27, the Veterans of Foreign Wars Garrett-Owenby Post 7807 and associated local veterans ser-

vice organizations will honor the men and women who have sacrificed their lives in service to this country.

The annual Memorial Day Ceremony will take place at 11 a.m. at the Towns County

Veterans Memorial Park, located just inside the main entrance to Towns County High School at 1400 US-76 in Hiawassee.

Featured will be singing performances by VFW post-

See Memorial Day, Page 7



The Memorial Day Service in Towns County always features a memorial wreath-laying to commemorate the sacrifices of America’s many military war dead. Photo by Lowell Nicholson/2019

City Hall to purchase new patrol cars for HPD

By Brittany Holbrooks
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

The Hiawassee City Council approved the purchase of two new police vehicles in a called meeting on Thursday, May 16.

Hiawassee Police Chief Jeremy Parker first introduced the idea of purchasing new patrol cars in the April 29 work session. He was seeking three new vehicles due to his concerns over damage and deficiencies among some of the current fleet, one of which doesn’t have a cage in the back.

Though the council viewed the damaged cars immediately following the work session, there were still con-



After the April 29 Hiawassee City Council work session, Police Chief Jeremy Parker showed council members the deteriorated state of several patrol cars to better explain the need to replace the vehicles. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

Hiawassee Pro Rodeo to rope up patriotic fun

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

The Fourth Annual Hiawassee Pro Rodeo will ride back into town with flags held high this Memorial Day Weekend, May 24-26, inside the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds.

Admission is \$20 per person, with children 5 and under, getting in free. Tickets are available for purchase now at <https://georgiamountainfairgrounds.com/> and in person at 1311 Music Hall Road in Hiawassee.

The rodeo begins at 8 p.m. all three nights, and Fairgrounds General Manager Hilda Thomason advises people to show up early when



The Hiawassee Pro Rodeo is a draw not once, but twice a year, every Memorial Day and Labor Day weekends. Photo by Lowell Nicholson/2020

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United Community

TCHS Baccalaureate...from Page 1

addressed the students before leading his prayer for the evening, relating amusing stories and fond times he has shared with the graduating seniors.

Jarrard focused his message on "growth and change," remarking how he felt blessed to have been able to watch the students grow from children into successful young adults.

He encouraged the seniors to continue to grow in the face of trials and tribulations by leaning on God, as the Apostle Paul encouraged his fellow Christians to do in Philippians 4:13 when he wrote, "I can do all things through Christ which strengthens me."

McConnell Executive Pastor Jeremy Pearson reminded students of what he has said for years: "Show me your friends, and I'll show you your future." He asked them to "pray about who your friends are" moving forward, as those they associate with will inevitably influence their lives.

Pearson told the students that God created humans as relational beings, to be in a relationship not just with Him, but with fellow humans as well. As such, Pearson said students would be wise to be intentional in selecting who they choose to be around as young Christian men and women.

In the leadup to his prayer, McConnell Youth Pastor Andrew Rogers said that, having graduated Towns County High himself seven years ago, he had some things he wanted to share that he wished he had realized before starting his post-graduation journey.

Rogers thought he was walking a Christian path, but it took much personal struggle



Senior Brelan Sieveking held the opening prayer for her Class of 2024 Baccalaureate Service Sunday. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

to see that he had not been "abiding" in Christ – a realization he said changed his life in 2018 when he finally began relying on Jesus as the "source" of true strength that he could "lean into in all things."

McConnell Associate Pastor Danny Byers led the "Blessing of Graduates," calling students, family members

and friends alike to the front of the sanctuary to lay hands on the seniors during the final prayer of the service, and the evening ended with smiles and warm embraces.

Towns County High will host its commencement exercises on Friday, May 24, at 8 p.m. inside Frank McClure Memorial Stadium.



TCHS seniors Stone Chauncey, Tanner Cunningham and Brady McConnell provided special music at this year's baccalaureate. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

New Patrol Cars...from Page 1

cerns about accruing debt, as the city has decided not to take on new debt during ongoing construction of the Paris Business Center.

Some suggestions included purchasing all three vehicles at once or purchasing one immediately with the help of drug seizure money, then another in July, after the start of Fiscal Year 2025, to mitigate costs.

Ultimately, the decision came in the called meeting last week, which saw the council approving the purchase of one vehicle for the current fiscal year and a second vehicle for Fiscal Year 2025.

Following some research, Councilman Jay Chastain Jr. was able to negotiate more affordable vehicle prices than the ones council members were initially going to approve in the called meeting.

Chastain contacted Jacky Jones of Cleveland, which will be able to sell two Dodge Durangos at \$39,969 apiece, one to be purchased now and another in FY25.

The vehicles will need to be outfitted for \$7,500 each for a total per-vehicle cost of \$47,469, which will save the city \$11,731 per vehicle over the original estimates.

Also in the called meeting, the council awarded the City Hall roof replacement job to Cox Roofing, a local company, for \$52,995.

Cox Roofing did not submit the lowest bid, however, due to poor online reviews regarding the lowest bidder, Councilwoman Amy Barrett said she recommended Cox to receive the job, and the council agreed.

And in their May 7 regular meeting, the council approved one of their own, Johnathan Wilson, to replace

Councilman Chastain as a City Hall representative on the Hiwassee Building and Planning Committee.

In other regular meeting news, according to a brief update on the parrot-feather weed treatments in Lake Chatuge, there are "no issues with the Water Treatment Plant, no issues with the water," following concerns about dead fish.

"There was all this talk about there was dead carp because of the treatment – negative," Mayor Liz Ordiales said. "There were two dead carp that were there before the treatment people went to treat it. They are right now doing treatment half a mile away from the Water Treatment Plant."

Treatment is only currently going as deep as 12 feet, and the city's water supply is pulled from 18 feet, and the herbicide will not impact wildlife or drinking water.

The city-owned historic property, the Berrong-Oakley House, faced a change in plans recently because the shingles set to be used in its roof renovation were discontinued at the beginning of the year.

Historical Society President Tyler Osborn reassured the council in the April 29 work session that a new type of shingle had been found at an additional cost of \$3,314, bringing the total cost of the restorative project to \$27,801.04. The change was approved by the council on May 7.

The Local Road Assistance Supplemental Grant, courtesy of the Georgia Department of Transportation, comes with no local match for its \$25,071 payout. The decision to accept the grant was unanimous on May 7.

The funding will be used to repair the sidewalk out front of the Paris Business Center

block and another stretch in front of Coldwell Banker High Country Realty on Main Street.

Council members also approved amendments to the FY 2024 Budget in light of the first reading of the FY 2025 Budget. In short, an additional \$46,000 was needed to cover salaries, so the money was taken from the FY 2024 General Fund, which ended up coming out to \$641,000.

Automated Clearing House is a network used to electronically move money between bank accounts, and it was approved at the May 7 meeting to conduct transactions regarding vendor payments for the city, ensuring safer, more reliable exchanges.

"At least one check every month, on average, goes missing, and we wind up having to somehow reissue a check, pay with a credit card – which costs us," explained City Clerk Bonnie Kendrick at the previous work session.

GIRMA Property Insurance was renewed, costing \$60,285. The plan protects "commercial property and its content," and it was the cheapest available option despite a cost increase of \$10,112 for the year.

Following complaints that it "discriminates against mobile homes," Councilwoman Amy Barrett proposed an amendment to the Manufactured Home Ordinance to essentially provide "a more affordable housing option," with a first reading in the regular meeting.

The Shook House has finally found a tenant in Paris Business Center client Terry Mayhew, a certified counselor who also does testing for patients with Alzheimer's and dementia. Mayhew was approved for the Shook House on May 7.

Pro Rodeo...from Page 1

the gates open at 6 p.m., both to check out the many vendors who will be setting up shop and to grab the best seats.

For the past three years, the event has proven so popular that available seating has sold out every rodeo. And last year, the Southern Pro Rodeo Company had to bring 500 additional bleacher seats to accommodate everyone who wanted to attend.

Rodeo guests with mobility issues will have access to a golf cart shuttle to and from the front gate, so everyone will have an opportunity to come and enjoy the three-day event.

As always, the Hiwassee Pro Rodeo will be packed full of iconic American sporting displays, to feature all the Wild West spectacle fans have come to expect, plus many family-friendly activities for folks of all ages to enjoy alongside multiple popular food options.

"Enjoy the best bucking horses, bulls, world-class contestants from all over the United States and Canada, and the top-of-the-line specialty acts! This is a family event that will definitely keep you on the edge of your seat with live entertainment," promises the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds.

Several patriotic offerings will once again feature prominently in the Friday-Sunday rodeo, including country music artist Destin Bennett opening with the National Anthem, and Pastor Nathan Browning of Calvary Baptist Church will be giving the opening prayer each night.

The International Pro Rodeo Association-sanctioned event has won an award every

year, and Thomason attributes the rodeo's success to the overwhelming support of the attending public and the great participation of area businesses as sponsors – like presenting sponsor John Megel Ford.

"I want to say a big thank you to all of the sponsors that we have received," Thomason said. "Businesses have been so supportive of being a part of the rodeo. It's a great way to advertise and promote their business, which I'm very grateful for that."

The rodeo has grown so much since its first outing that the Fairgrounds now hosts a second rodeo each year, on Labor Day Weekend, and people can go ahead and mark their calendars for that upcoming event.

As always, members of the community are invited to volunteer for all the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds events throughout the year, which range from concerts to fireworks to wine and beer festivals.

This past weekend marked the return of a re-branded cooking festival that was held for 10 years before a three-year hiatus, and by all accounts, the Georgia Mountain Fire & Smoke Cooking Festival was a huge success on May 18.

"People loved it better than anything because of all the great food, and people were happy when they were eating," Thomason said. "I had a great bluegrass band down there, and people just loved it."

To volunteer, just call the Fairgrounds Main Office at 706-896-4191 to be added to the list.

Looking ahead, people

won't want to miss the brand-new Laser Show coming to the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds, with admission at \$10 per person, 12 and under free.

"There's not a laser show anywhere near us," Thomason said. "Stone Mountain Park is probably the closest one, which is 100 miles from us, but we're going to have a beautiful laser show at the Fairgrounds on July 27."

"We're going to start at 4 o'clock in the afternoon with all kinds of cornhole and activities and food trucks and booths. Then, at 6 p.m., Riverbend is going to play in the parking lot, and True Youngblood will play at 7. We'll have the laser show at dark at 9:45."

"It's going to be a beautiful laser show. It's going to have a big video screen at the top of the hill at the gardens, and that's just an added feature; the way they do the lasers, that's going to be all over the parking lot."

Thomason also wants people to be aware of the June 15 concert featuring Riverbend at Anderson Music Hall – a show that will be completely free for the community to attend.

"The gates are going to open at 5 p.m., and the show is going to start at 6," Thomason said. "They'll have an opening act that's going on in front of them, and then Riverbend will play right after that. We'll have the concession stand open for the free concert. We want the community to come out and support the local musician."

For more information on these and many other exciting upcoming events, visit the Fairgrounds' website.

Quilts of Valor Award Ceremony honors Veterans Odis "Eddie" Adams, Darell Dansby & Thomas Burbach



(L-R) Army Veteran Odis "Eddie" Adams, Air Force Veteran Darell Dansby and Navy Veteran Thomas Burbach

By: Susan Young

Misty Mountain Quilts of Valor (QOV) quilters were honored to award three veterans a Quilt of Valor on Saturday, May 11, 2024, at the Union County Historical Courthouse on the Square. The quilts were made and presented to these honored veterans, with their many friends and family in attendance. Anyone who has been "touched by war" may be nominated for a QOV.

Odis "Eddie" Adams
Andrews, NC
U.S. Army, 1965-77
Vietnam

Eddie Adams was drafted into the Army 1965 and was sent to Ft. Jackson, SC for basic. From there, he went to Ft. Bragg, NC for AIT (Advanced Infantry Training). His next stop was to Ft. Riley, Kansas with the 1st Division, where his fellow soldiers and he organized into the 9th Infantry Division. From Ft. Riley, he was deployed to Vietnam as a member of BTRY B 38N 34 ARTY USARV APOF 96333. They were shipped to Van Tah, Vietnam. He spent most of his time in the MeKong Delta, where their compound was once overrun, and he experienced hand-to-hand combat with the North Vietnamese. He was honorably discharged in 1967, but then served in the Army Reserves Det 2, 210 MP Company until discharge from the Reserves on June 3, 1977. During his time in Army Reserves, he attended the National Guard Recruiting and Retention School, Winston-Salem, NC from March 20-21, 1976.

For his honorable service, he was awarded the Vietnam Service Medal, a Purple Heart, the National Defense Service Medal, the Vietnam Campaign Medal, and the Army Commendation Medal. He achieved Expert rating in the M14 Rifle.

Eddie came home to Andrews in 1968 and married Donna in 1973. He worked at and retired from Nantahala Power and Light, which was sold out to Duke Energy.

Darell Dansby, E-6
Blairsville, GA
U.S. Air Force, 1969-1989
multiple deployments

Darell Dansby said he joined the USAF one day before he received his draft notice!! He completed Basic Training at Sheppard AFB, in San Antonio, Texas. He then was based at Beale AFB in California, and he served as a Vehicle operator or dispatcher for the next 13 years; His duty stations included Warner Robins AFB – GA; overseas as a Vehicle Operator /Dispatcher in Keflavik, Iceland; and also as a Vehicle Operator for the Joint Chief of Staff at Barksdale AFB in Louisiana. His last 7 years of active duty he served as a Jet Engine mechanic on B-52 Bombers and KC-135 aircraft, where he worked on the Flight line.

Darell is proud to be married to Barbara for 55 years.

Thomas Burbach
Young Harris, GA
U.S. Navy, Nuclear
Submariner, Mediterranean
Cold War deployment

Tom enlisted while in his Senior year of high school, following his three brothers who were all in the Navy. He had an initial six-year enlistment and he chose the nuclear power program, volunteering for submarine duty (he says, "you have to be crazy to volunteer for a ship they sink on purpose"). He took basic training at the Great Lakes Naval Training Center and training to become a machinist mate before he went to nuclear power training for six months at Bainbridge, MD. He trained for a nuclear prototype for six months at Ballston Spa, New York. Training was done for 12-hour days on each shift: 7 days on dayshift, one day off, 7 on second shift, 4 days off, repeat. He was recruited to

take the staff instructor position for 2 years. He then reenlisted for two more years.

He reported to the fast attack submarine USS L. Mendel Rivers (SSN 686) in Charleston, SC in December of 1975. He says SSN stands for Submarine Ship Nuclear, but he says it actually means Saturdays, Sundays and Nights.

The Rivers was named after a SC Congressman, which gave them the privilege of being a tour boat when they weren't in maintenance, or on a six-month Mediterranean cruise. He participated in Mediterranean deployments twice in 2 years. He says the sub followed Russian subs around the Mediterranean. "They never found us and neither did the USN skimmers that tried to!" Tom says there are only two types of ships: Submarines, and targets.

Nearly 383,000 quilts have been made by QOV quilters from all 50 states, and have been awarded to men and women who have served their country, including many veterans from WW II, Korea, Viet Nam, and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Anyone can nominate a veteran who has been touched by war for a Quilt of Valor by going online to <http://www.qovf.org/>. Look on the top left of the screen to the red bar on the page, and click on the words "NOMINATIONS AND AWARDS", and then follow the instructions to fill in the "Online Nomination Form". Misty Mountain QOV is honored to provide these quilts to our local veterans and encourage you to nominate someone for a QOV.

If you are a quilter, and would like to help the Misty Mountain QOV group make these quilts for heroic American veterans, please go to the following website: <http://www.mistymountainquilt-guild.org/>, click on the word "More" on the top right of the home page, and then look for the QOV group information. QOV quilters make it our mission to support our local veterans with comforting and healing Quilts of Valor.

TCHS Senior Honors...from Page 1

zations, such as charities and post-secondary institutions. Young Harris College, Appalachian Shriners and the Young Harris Wing House, for example, were among those providing financial aid to deserving young scholars.

Others were given from couples, families, and even individuals. Superintendent Dr. Darren Berrong, for instance, introduced the first-ever Neil and Judy Dover Scholarship.

Neil Dover graduated Class of 1952 and has remained a lifelong Towns County resident. His love of community led him to set aside an outstanding \$150,000 for scholarship funds; for at least the next 30 years, two Towns County graduates – one male, one female – will receive \$3,000 each in Dover's name.

Others, like the Unico Saddle Club's addition of the Dana Hood Memorial Scholarship, were handed out to honor

a special person's memory. Hood "worked hard to encourage the enjoyment and horsemanship of young people" before her passing in 2020.

This year, Hood's very own niece, Emma Dale, emotionally received the scholarship of \$1,000 as the audience cheered.

In all, 63 scholarships and recognitions were handed out on Friday.

"Class of 2024, I am proud to be your principal ... You have left an endearing mark that I will never forget," said TCHS Principal Bryan Thomason, quoting Winnie the Pooh with some admittedly invaluable support. "You are braver than you believe, stronger than you seem, and smarter than you think."

When it came time to announce the Top Three GPA-earners for the Class of 2024, Dhriti Patel was hoping to hear her name called as Valedictorian.

And the 2024 STAR Student was not disappointed.

"I'm glad all this hard work has paid off," Patel remarked with a dose of good humor, adding that she will be attending the Georgia Institute of Technology to pursue a degree in architecture. She credits her mother as her biggest cheerleader, and part of the reason for her success.

Patel will have a big speech to deliver at graduation later this week, but at the Friday morning awards presentation, she advised her classmates to "follow your dreams; that's what keeps you going."

Eli Phillips was named Salutatorian, saying he "didn't know it was coming." Now that he's about to graduate, Phillips is just happy he was able to complete his studies "to the best of my ability," as he'll be leaving academia behind.

Inspired by his father David Phillips, who happens to serve on the Towns County School Board, Phillips has decided to pursue aviation. He's already on the fast track to the skies, having earned his pilot's license. Rather than attend college, he will continue to prac-



The entire community should be proud of Towns County's Class of 2024, which celebrated senior achievement last Friday, a week before graduation. Pictured here: students who have earned the High Honors distinction.

Photo by Lowell Nicholson

tice until he can secure a career with an airline company.

"Just keep working hard and don't give up; keep going," Phillips said to the rest of his classmates, though he was sure to acknowledge the role his teachers and family have played in helping him get where he is now.

"It's a great honor, honestly," said Brant Youngblood upon securing the third-place Historian title. "It really feels

like a culmination of all my hard work over the past four years. I didn't expect to be top of the class by any means; we have a lot of really great kids here."

Youngblood aims to attend the University of Georgia for at least a semester. Although undecided on a focused field of study, he's nevertheless eager to see where the Lord leads him.

As far as words of wis-

dom for his classmates go, Youngblood advised, "Just keep working hard. I mean, you see where it's gotten all of us. You know, you never have anything bad happen to you working hard, so I just say strive to be the best you can be."

The Class of 2024 Graduation Ceremony will take place on May 24 at 8 p.m. on the football field of Frank McClure Memorial Stadium.

Sheriff's Office makes three more arrests in 'war on drugs'

News Special

On Saturday, May 11, Towns County Sheriff's Office deputies assisted the Georgia State Patrol on a traffic stop on Highway 66.

Probable cause was established, and a search of the vehicle resulted in the confiscation of methamphetamine, which field-tested positive, and drug-related objects.

Anthony Howard Holcombe, 54, homeless, was arrested and charged with felony possession of methamphetamine, felony possession of a firearm/knife during the commission of a crime, and possession and use of drug-related objects.

Joshua Michael Runge-Koss, 34, of Clayton, was also arrested and charged with felony possession of methamphetamine, felony possession of a firearm/knife during the commission of a crime, and possession and use of drug-related objects.

Sheriff Ken Henderson commends the Georgia State Patrol and Towns County Sheriff's Office working together to keep the community safe.

In a separate incident on Monday, May 13, Towns County Sheriff's deputies responded to a call to assist EMS with an individual on the side of Highway 76E.

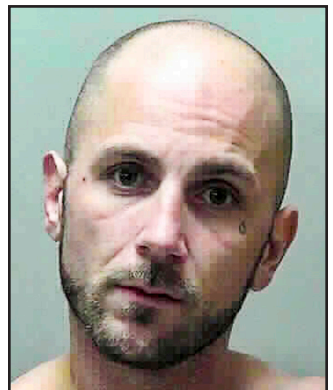
During the call, probable cause was developed to search for drugs.

A search was executed for the individual's person and an amount of methamphetamine, which field-tested positive, was confiscated along with drug-related objects.

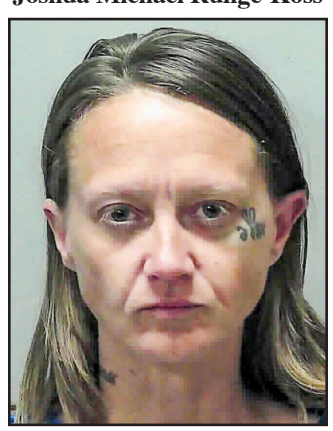
Rebecca Lynn Griffis, 37, homeless, was arrested and charged with felony possession of methamphetamine and possession and use of drug-related objects.



Anthony Howard Holcombe



Joshua Michael Runge-Koss



Rebecca Lynn Griffis

Sheriff Henderson is pleased with the Sheriff's Office deputies continuing the war on drugs.

Memorial Day...from Page 1

members, participation by the North Georgia Honor Guard, prayers by the VFW and American Legion chaplains, the laying of memorial wreaths by local veterans service organizations, a recognition of dignitaries and more.

The keynote speaker for the event will be Veteran Dave Waldrop, a highly decorated fighter pilot who enlisted in the U.S. Air Force and served in Vietnam. A Marietta resident, he lives in Hiawassee part-time and is a longtime member of VFW Post 7807.

By the time Waldrop completed his combat tour as a first lieutenant in December of 1967, he had flown 105 combat missions in North Vietnam, including 49 missions over Hanoi, driving the F-105D Thunderchief, a supersonic tactical fighter-bomber.

His achievements while flying in combat include three Silver Stars, three Distinguished Flying Crosses, 12 Air Medals, one Well Done Medal, one ejection in Southeast Asia from an F-105, one confirmed MiG-17 gun kill, and one probable MiG-17 gun kill.

He earned one of his Silver Stars for preventing another F-105 from being gunned down by the two MiGs on its tail, one of which was firing. Fortunately, Waldrop was the better shot that day and saved his fellow pilot.

After landing, Waldrop heard from famed Wing Commander Robin Olds, whom he had passed in the air to take on the enemy MiGs. Olds said that Waldrop engaged the MiGs "like a shark after a minnow," earning him the nickname "Shark."

Following his service overseas, Waldrop flew as a Weapons Research and Development Test Pilot, and over his military career, he received the opportunity to fly pretty much

everything that was in service at the time.

Waldrop left the Air Force as a captain in 1970 and joined Delta Airlines, where he flew for 32 years. After joining Delta, he transferred to the Marine Corps Reserves at Dobbins Air Force Base here in Georgia and flew the F-8 Crusader before it was retired from service.

Upon leaving the reserves, Waldrop built and flew a Pitts Special biplane and joined a formation air show team, and he has experience leading the two-plane Red Eagle aerobatic team.

He has given presentations before on his military experiences, but Waldrop said he has never been asked to deliver a Memorial Day address and is honored for the opportunity.

During his service in Vietnam, Waldrop knew many good service members who died in-country and others who returned with life-changing injuries, and he doesn't hold back the disdain he feels for the U.S. leaders who sent youths to die in a war they were "not even allowed to win."

"We lost 40% of the F-105D models flying over North Vietnam," Waldrop said. "That's a high percentage. I'll never relieve myself of the bitterness and animosity that I feel toward Lyndon Baines Johnson and Robert McNamara."

The tens of thousands of service members America lost in Vietnam are among the many war dead that Waldrop will memorialize in his remarks on May 27.

"We're going to be honoring those that didn't make it home," Waldrop said. "We have to focus on that and keep that in mind."

In the event of inclement weather, the Memorial Day service will be held at the VFW Post Building located at 1329 Sunnyside Road in Hiawassee.