

Buena Vista University Remembers:

A tribute to Beavers who gave their all in World War II

There is a place in Papua, New Guinea called Iowa

BY PHOEBE FEIS

There has never been a formal declaration of this fact—no diplomats have held negotiations and no ribbon has been cut—but it is nonetheless true. The place is small—just a bit of land a few feet long and wide—and is entirely nondescript. In fact, there has never been anything at all to suggest that this land is Iowa except for a simple wooden sign taking the form of a small, white cross. It is difficult to know what exactly was written on the cross, when it stood there. Perhaps there were dates carved into the soft wood. Perhaps IOWA was emblazoned across the white front. Or, perhaps, there was nothing at all on this grave except for a single name: Lloyd L. McCabe.



PHOEBE FEIS



LLOYD MCCABE

MANY HOMES

Lloyd McCabe was originally from Rapid City, South Dakota, but, following his mother's death when he was three and his father's subsequent illness, the McCabe children were scattered to the wind. For Lloyd, the youngest, this meant being sent to Laurens, Iowa to live with extended family. He thrived there, and, as remembered by the Laurens Sun, "always considered Laurens his home." Following his father's death in 1934, Laurens and the Erickson family truly became Lloyd's world. He even informally took the last name of his adoptive family, going by Lloyd Erickson in all school activities, from plays to basketball. He was Lloyd Erickson to his friends at BVC, too.

After graduating high school in the spring of 1941, Lloyd enrolled at Buena Vista College, immediately joining the Alpha Delta Alpha fraternity and becoming fast "friends" with fellow freshman Lucy Armstrong, whom he dated for a year before The Tack reported their break-up. While at BVC, Lloyd explored his passion for acting—participating in several college plays—and found numerous friends on his new campus. Just like Laurens, Lloyd made BVC into his home. A home he would soon have to leave.

In June 1942, just a month after the end of his first year of college, Lloyd and 54 other young men from Laurens registered for Selective Service. Eight months later, Lloyd en-

tered the service. Lloyd was sent to Camp Roberts, California, where he trained with the 145th Infantry Regiment, 37th Infantry Division. In July 1943, he was sent to the South Pacific, likely to serve as a replacement in the ongoing and costly New Georgia Campaign.

HILL 700

Following New Georgia, Lloyd and the 145th were sent to Bougainville in November 1943. The largest in the Solomon Islands chain, Bougainville—located some 550 miles from the Papua New Guinea mainland—served as a strategic foothold against the Japanese Rabaul Air Base. The U.S. Campaign to isolate Rabaul had been going on for months by that point, and Bougainville would be the final piece in the puzzle. On November 6, the 145th Infantry Regiment came ashore and helped form part of the 62,000-man perimeter that stretched for thirteen miles across the island. The 145th was assigned to the direct center of the line, known as Hill 700.

Instead of sitting in the classroom of Professor "Bugs" Smith or attempting to rekindle his romance with Lucy, Lloyd spent the winter of 1943 and early months of 1944 in the wet, miserable humidity of the jungle, terrorized by mortar fire and boredom. The steep slopes of Hill 700—thought to be nearly impenetrable by the Japanese—were nothing like Lloyd had ever

known. It must have been difficult to find any piece of Iowa, of BVC, in that jungle. The foliage, the flowers, and even the dirt were different. There was no home to be found on Bougainville.

"ONE OF MY BEST BUDDIES"

On March 8, 1944, Japanese forces attacked with the rising of the sun. Although the Americans knew an attack was coming, they were not prepared for the ferocity of the attacks against Hill 700. The steepness of the slopes made them difficult for the Japanese to climb, but also made it difficult for the 145th to see and aim. The Japanese used this cover to their advantage, and the brutal fight for Hill 700 was on. Poor weather made visibility difficult and close quarters made combat barbaric. At times, soldiers fought with knives and bayonets rather than bullets and mortars.

By dawn on March 9, the 145th had managed to hold on to their position, but the Japanese had made significant progress on the Northern slope of the hill. To prevent any further gains, Lloyd and the men of his battalion were ordered to launch a counter-attack against the Northern slope. Intense mortar barrages and sniper fire slowed the counterattack to a crawl, and it quickly became a battle of inches. When night fell on Bougainville, twenty-nine Americans lay dead on Hill 700. Among them was Lloyd McCabe. "I can't say how it



Torokina Point, the cemetery McCabe was buried in on Bougainville.



The steep hills of Bougainville.

happened," wrote a fellow member of the 145th—who was also from Laurens—to Lloyd's parents, "but don't worry, I'll never forget as long as I live. He was one of my best buddies." At just twenty years old, Lloyd was the youngest Beaver to be killed in the war.

FOREVER LAURENS

When the Japanese were finally driven back, Lloyd's body was collected by his friends and the Company Chaplain and taken to the temporary cemetery near the village of Torokina. With full military honors, Lloyd was laid to rest. There, beneath a simple white cross and at the meeting of flesh and soil, the land was anointed. As the Laurens Sun wrote, quoting WWI Poet Rupert Brooke, "we know that there is a corner of a foreign field that is forever Laurens."

At BVC, Lloyd's name was published on the growing list of Beaver casualties, and President Henry Olson gave the

lost Beavers a eulogy and led alumni in prayer and benediction. Somewhere, perhaps young Lucy Armstrong read the list and wept for what could have been.

With the introduction of the US Government's Return the Dead program in 1946, Lloyd, like over 170,000 other servicemembers, was brought home. In 1948, he was buried under the name McCabe, but was interred in the Erickson family plot.

Back at Torokina, the other casualties of the battle were returned home or transferred to the Manila American Cemetery. Lloyd's cross was removed, the soil settled back into place, and flowers bloomed at Bougainville.

BVU REMEMBERS

Now, 81 years later, the island is quiet. The traces of war have been swallowed up by time and the rusting tanks and ammunition boxes serve as hulking, hallowed out me-

morials to a forgotten hill in a bygone era.

But the earth never forgets. It remembers the heat and fire of battle, the comrade from Laurens knelt next to a wooden cross, and letters from friends at BVC tucked into a jacket pocket.

It remembers that it is the small corner of the world belonging to Laurens. Belonging to Iowa. Belonging to BVU.

Finding Lloyd's former gravesite, this piece of home, would be nearly impossible if you visited today. But, if the light was just right, perhaps you could spot it still. Perhaps you'd find, if you only looked closely enough, that those jungle flowers aren't so unfamiliar after all. Maybe—just maybe—among the blades of grass and tangling vines, you'd find an Iowa Prairie Rose, blooming up from borrowed soil, glittering in the sun, and turned eastward, always facing the land it knows as its own.

Did you know that 18 young men who attended Buena Vista College were killed in action in World War II? It's a staggering number, arrived at by husband and wife BVU history professors Dixee Bartholomew-Feis and Bill Feis, along with their daughter Phoebe Feis, a 2019 graduate of Alta-Aurelia High School and graduate student at American University in Washington, D.C., studying Public History. All three have searched old issues of the student newspaper The Tack, Storm Lake newspapers and other sources to uncover the stories of the 18 deceased veterans. Now the Feis family wants to share the fruits of their research with Storm Lake Times Pilot readers in a series of columns by Phoebe about the young soldiers and the sacrifices they made. The series comes at a fitting time, the 80th anniversary of D-Day and the upcoming 80th anniversary of VE-Day next April.

INVESTING
IN YOUR
ENERGY
FUTURE

REGISTER TO EARN A
\$1,000
SCHOLARSHIP

Iowa high school students and their parents or guardians can win a chance at a \$1,000 scholarship by opening a savings account.

▶ Register online by March 31, 2025, at www.iowaStudentLoan.org/Savings.

▶ All participants receive free college planning and financing tip emails.

www.iowaStudentLoan.org/Savings

UNRESERVED ONLINE AUCTION

LAURENS, IOWA
RESIDENTIAL APARTMENTS
»SELLING IN 3 TRACTS«

▶ **Tract #1: 213 Section Line Road**
BAL 125' NORTH LAURENS BLK 16, Zoned: Residential-Parcel ID: 0122385004, 0.32 Acres; 13,750 SF Lot – 7,104 SF Building, Built in 1969.

▶ **Tract #2: 303 Main Street**
LOT 77" PT OL 7 ALLEN'S ADD, Zoned: Residential-Parcel ID: 0127208002 0.56 Acres; 24,394 SF Lot, Built in 1943.

▶ **Tract #3: 405 Sadie Street Unit 409**
LOT 160.61x174.00 N CENT PT LOT 3, Zoned: Residential-Parcel ID: 0127402016, 0.64 Acres; 27,878 SF Lot – 2802 SF Each Building (1404/ Level), Built in 1976.

Note: Property is for sale locally and seller reserves the right to end this auction at any time.

» BID ONLINE MAR. 25-APR. 8, 2025 «
BIDDING ENDS AT 1:00 P.M. CENTRAL

Contact Your Listing Agent
Sam Harper 712.339.5002

BigIron REALTY www.bigiron.com
800.887.8625
4860 33rd Avenue, Columbus, NE 68601

NOBODY COVERS LOCAL NEWS LIKE THE STORM LAKE TIMES!