

## ***Reuben Burge***

### **Veteran of the month September 2021 – view to the past**

He has served his country and his family – Reuben Burge has set a wonderful example with his life. He lives on land in Coal County where he has memories of growing up. Reuben has a view of some of the big trees on his property from his front window and enjoys seeing cows walk past his yard in the evening.

Reuben was chosen as Choctaw Nation Veteran of the Month for September of 2021. He served two years in the Army after being inducted January 9, 1953. Reuben said, “I went through boot camp at Ft. Sill in Lawton, Oklahoma, then was sent to Ft. Carson, Colorado to get trained for the Korean War. We were getting ready for war, but before we were out of basic, the war was shut down, so we went back to Ft. Sill where they were training people to be officers.”

Achieving the rank of Corporal, he was a Section Leader in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Section A Battery of the 537 Field Artillery Battalion Unit serving in a leadership role over seven soldiers. “They used our equipment in the officers’ training at Ft. Sill. They took our trucks and cannons and showed trainees how to use them.” He told of how he was chosen to shoot a Howitzer. “I had never shot one before – I hit three out of four shots!”

Reuben had married prior to entering the service, and he and his wife, Betty, had a son born while at Ft. Sill. “Our favorite place to live was in Colorado,” he said. Betty said they had friends from Colorado they kept in touch with throughout their lifetime. “We still keep in touch today with friends we made in 1953.”

“When we moved back from Colorado to Ft. Sill,” said Reuben, “Betty was pregnant. We got into a bad snowstorm, and had to drive on bad roads in the snow. She delivered the baby two weeks later!”

As a Section Leader, Reuben was called upon to do Honor Guard duty at funerals. “I would take a squad and perform the 21-gun salute.”

To earn a little extra cash, Reuben started sewing patches for the other guys. “Every time someone got promoted, I would take their patches home and we would sew them on. That way, we would make a little extra money!”

After discharge from the service, the Burges lived in Oklahoma City, where Reuben worked at a meat packing place, Wilson and Company. “I had worked there before I went into the service. I worked there a total of 31 years, then took early retirement to move back to Coalgate.” He and Betty had been driving back and forth every weekend to help his mother. “We built a house near my mother’s homeplace and have been very happy.”

Reuben and Betty have lived on their country property in Coalgate since 1982. The area has a lot of history. “It was my grandparent’s land, and was part of the original allotments given to Indian people before statehood,” he said. “There is an Indian cemetery on the property.”

Much of the history linked to the property is personal to Reuben. “My parents were farmers near here. We had three teams of mules – one each for my father, my brother and me to plow and farm. We raised our own grain, and we lived off hogs that we raised. One year, a disease came that killed all our hogs. It was hard that year! We hunted squirrels and we fur-hunted.”

Reuben laughed and told that they even hunted skunk for the fur. “Dad knew how to pull a skunk out upside down by the tail so they couldn’t spray. He got seven out of one hole one

time. Mother would get upset. She did the laundry! Even when stink would come out in the wash, it would smell again when the hot iron hit it!”

He said their farm had cows, chickens and turkeys. “When I was a little tyke, Mother wanted me to follow a turkey hen to find the nest. I followed her all day. That hen never went to the nest. I guess she knew I was watching.”

Reuben said he thought his mother would have liked to attend church regularly but they didn’t have transportation.

“We lived eight miles from Coalgate. That is also where the closest doctor was.”

He attended Lone Star School – a small school that went through 8<sup>th</sup> grade. “It was a mile and a half walk. Dad cut a foot-log and laid it across Salt Creek so we could get across.” Reuben grew up with a brother, Hicks Calvin Burge, and sister, Oma Sue Lackey.

Reuben recently purchased a sixteen-acre plot of land that was originally his grandfather’s land. He said the purchase is a new “best memory” to go along with other good memories. “I remember playing there when there was no grass, just smooth ground. We had marbles and croquet sets. We had a few goats. We had a little cart to hook the goats up to and they could pull us around.”

Reuben met Betty when he was buddies with her brother. “We were hunting and fishing and went back to his house. She made us popcorn. I love popcorn.” They were married 69 years ago.

Betty was in high school and Reuben was working in Oklahoma City. He would catch a bus to come home on weekends. “I was able to do a lot to help my Dad while working – like get him a tractor and help get him a pickup.”

Reuben and Betty have 23 grandchildren and several great-grandchildren. His message to them and future generations is, “Stay off drugs! I never did drugs. I never smoked. I don’t think it is necessary.”

Good memories, good advice.

Cut line:

Ruben Burge has a good view of his land from his front window at home in Coal County. He is usually outside working, though. Life in the country for farmers and ranchers means there is always something that needs to be done!

Photo by Judy Allen.