



CHAHTA SIA HOKE



*Living out the Chahta Spirit
of Faith, Family and Culture.*

Rattan legend turns 100

Leo Smallwood of Rattan celebrated his 100th birthday July 22, 2017. Family and friends joined him for food, fun and lots of memories. "The corner piece of cake is my favorite," said Leo with a smile.

The war hero, sports legend of Rattan and beloved family man had plenty to talk about with the many people attending his party. Any visit with Leo is an interesting history of our Nation and area. Leo was a teacher at Frazier Valley, a one-teacher school, when he was drafted into the Army during WWII. Basic Training was at Fort Sill. "Some of the soldiers who were shot up were coming back, so we went to Camp Wolters, Texas, for artillery training. I was in the Infantry. I landed on Omaha Beach six days after the Invasion," said Leo. He was in the Battle of the Bulge. "It was the coldest weather I believe ever existed," said Leo. "A lot of the guys lost fingers, feet, and even arms from frostbite," said Leo, who was fortunate to find some newspaper to wrap his feet in, then found some old French snowshoes to wear. He credits these "lucky finds" to keeping his feet from freezing during the war. "My feet still get cold sometimes." He keeps a blanket over his legs and feet. His favorite is the Wisdom Blanket gifted him by Chief Batton.

"I was overseas 18 months. They were going to give Belgium to the Führer for a Christmas present, but he was disappointed!" said Leo.

A younger brother was serv-



A young Smallwood in uniform

ing in the Air Force at the same time Leo was in the Army. With a melancholy look, Leo said, "Since my mom and dad were without hardly any communications, I often wondered if they knew what danger we were really in. My brother, Roy, was in the 8th Air Force, stationed out of London. I was able to get a seven-day pass, and even though all our locations and everything were kept pretty secret, I went to the Red Cross and found out where he was. I made it to London and went in where he and his buddies were. They were sitting down and eating dinner at a table set like they were at home. I wasn't used to that! I was used to eating by opening a can!" Leo said Roy was thrilled to be surprised by big brother and it was a treat to have a really good meal.

"I even went on a flying mission with them," said Leo, who

wanted to see what the war looked like from the air. After sharing stories of the terribly cold weather Leo had been submitted to, the Airmen presented Leo with fur-lined pants and jacket, which he truly appreciated. "It was against Army regulations to wear them, but I sure appreciated those guys for doing it!" He also appreciated the three cartons of cigarettes they gave him, since smokes were rationed. He quit smoking later in life.

Upon returning to the states, Leo found that his little school was gone, so he and a buddy began looking for work in the Dallas area. They paid for room and board, and some extracurricular activities with Leo's winnings from poker that he brought home with him from the Army. It wasn't long, though, before the Rattan superintendent called and asked Leo if he wanted a job teaching and coaching. He was at work the following Monday morning and made a career at Rattan School.

The first year he taught Jr. High American History and coached the girls' team. After that he was the principal, taught American History and coached both boys and girls. Coaching the teams meant there was a lot of traveling to other schools in the area, including Finley, where a pretty young lady was teaching third grade. He soon began courting her, and when he asked Jane to be his wife, she said yes. She was able to begin teaching in Rattan the following year, and they made the town their home to raise six





Smallwood received the American Campaign Medal, Good Conduct Medal, Sharp Shooter Rifle Badge, European, African, Middle Eastern Campaign (EAME) Service Ribbon with three Bronze Stars, and a WWII Victory Medal. His dog tags are also framed with his medals.

children. They had been married 68 years when she passed on May 27, 2016.

“When I was coaching, my wife backed me in everything I did!” said Leo proudly. “She always had my meals ready before I caught the bus, and she only missed six weeks total in all her years of teaching. Together we had 67 years in public education.” He is delighted that the family they raised realized the importance of education. All of his children and grandchildren have college degrees.

Proudly displayed in his home is a silver trophy that has the distinguished history of being the very first trophy that Rattan School ever won. It was from a baseball club that Leo and his brother, William, played with. The trophy is engraved “Champions, 1935, SEOK League, Jack Cornelius Trophy.” During the 1935 Kiamichi Conference, Leo Smallwood’s position was short stop, and brother William Smallwood played first base. Clyde Fleming was second base on the team, Thomas Wall was third. The outfield was covered by Coy Buchanan, Gene Bradley and Homer Allen. The duties of pitcher and catcher for the team were covered by Odel Lindly and O.J. Lindly.

Perhaps succeeding in sports as a youth spurred his competitive nature as a coach. During his coaching career at Rattan, Leo led the school to over 625 baseball victories and 15 district titles. His basketball teams also did well, winning over 600 games and nine district titles. He actually changed Rattan’s sports program, starting with the school colors. Once black and orange, he changed them to green and white, which they remain today. He is very proud of being known for creating the Rattan school baseball program.

Leo said he is still very interested in sports, and likes to watch ballgames on television. He is also interested in Choctaw culture and history. His son, Steve, said Leo is artistically inclined and is a good carpenter. He remembers when Leo took a draw shave knife and made

a bois d’arc bow for the sons. He also made some of the furniture for the home.

Active all his life, even his hobbies centered around outdoor work. He said his hobby was his cattle. Leo had cattle and enjoyed working with them until he was 97 years old, when he sold all 91 of them. Until that point, Leo was working the cattle himself. “It was as sad as a funeral when I sold them,” said Leo.

He has some advice for young people. “Be yourselves—be who you are. Do not ever act as someone superior!”

When asked the secret to living so long, Leo says, “Oh, I don’t know, maybe good clean living, maybe good country food! I never remember, even during the depression, going to bed hungry. My mom always managed to cook up enough for the table.” And maybe he has good Choctaw genes. His mother lived until she was 95, and his dad until he was 97.

Any advice from Leo is bound to be good advice. He has a smile, bright eyes, a cheerful attitude and a sharp wit. And he is generous, too. He even shared his birthday cake—even the favored corner piece!