

## We Honor Veterans Newsletter



### October 2022 Edition

#### Army Veteran Preston Wollett, Jr.

Preston Eugene Wollett, Jr. was born in the Hampden area of Baltimore, Maryland on October 29, 1924. Preston attended school until the 8th grade.

Preston joined the Army on March 22, 1943 and served in the South Pacific. His unit participated in the Battle of Leyte in the Philippines and the Battle of Okinawa. Preston was wounded in Okinawa on April 12, 1945 and as a result received the Purple Heart. The Purple Heart is the oldest military award given to U.S. military members

Upon his recovery in Saipan, Preston was given the option to go home. However, he decided to return to his unit until the war ended. Preston Wollett was discharged from the Army after the end of WWII on January 13, 1946.

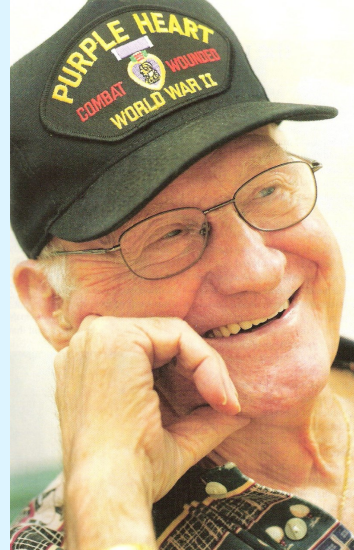
Preston and Mary Elizabeth Parks were married on February 22, 1946 (about one month after leaving the military). They had 2 children: Steve (1948) and Judy (1952).

Preston had many jobs in his life without any formal training. He worked at Kieckhefer Container Corporation as a machine operator and a shop steward. Preston also owned and operated a Cities Service gas station, worked as an electrician, and then as an estimator/supervisor for Noone Electric Company. Preston went to work for Mercy Hospital where he eventually retired as an Assistant Vice President overseeing thirteen departments and portions of the construction of a multi-million-dollar building.

At the age of 97, Preston Eugene Wollett, Jr. was honored by Gilchrist with a Salute to Service Tribute to thank him for his military service to our country. The tribute, conducted by Gilchrist staff and volunteers, included the National Anthem, Pledge of Allegiance and the presentation of the We Honor Veterans Pin from the Veterans Administration. Preston also received a certificate from Gilchrist, a thank you card made by an elementary student, and a special handmade patriotic blanket. The tribute concluded with the singing of God Bless America and a formal salute by veterans in uniform. Corporal Preston Wollett proudly returned the salute.



Preston Wollett in Uniform



Preston Wollett proudly wearing his Purple Heart cap



Salute to Service Tribute for Preston Wollett

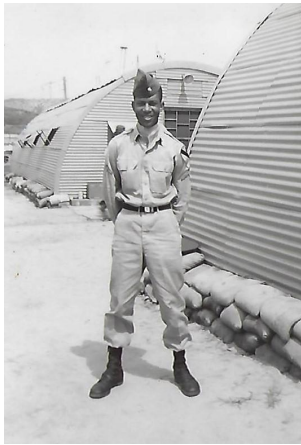
## Army Veteran Clayborne Black

Clayborne W. Black was born in 1940 in Smithfield, Virginia. He enlisted in the Army in December of 1958. Clayborne served in the infantry in Korea and was discharged from active duty in March of 1962.

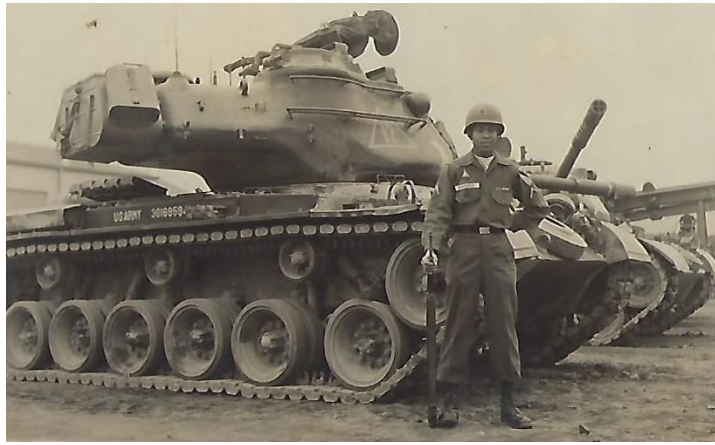
Clayborne married Rebecca M. Whitehead in 1958. They had five children: Angela, Vanessa, Clarissa, Veronica, and Malcolm. Rebecca passed away in 1976. In 1980, Clayborne married Esther M. Davis. Esther's children LaFaithier, Shelia, Darlene and Vontura became part of the family.

Clayborne Black was recently honored with a Salute to Service Tribute conducted by Gilchrist staff and volunteers. The tribute included the National Anthem, Pledge of Allegiance and the presentation of the We Honor Veterans Pin from the Veterans Administration. Clayborne also received a certificate from Gilchrist, a thank you card

made by an elementary student, and a special handmade patriotic blanket. Clayborne was given a formal salute by veterans in uniform. The tribute concluded with the singing of God Bless America.



Clayborne Black in Uniform



Clayborne Black on Duty



Clayborne Black Honored by Gilchrist Team

## Leroy “Roy” James Hook – Proud WWII Navy Veteran

On Sunday, December 2, 1941 Roy and his family were leaving for church when his father turned and said, "Go back in the house and turn off the radio". As Roy stepped back into the house, he heard the stunning announcement that Pearl Harbor had been attacked. After church, Roy met with friends, and they talked about how the attack would impact all their lives. Thus, his life was on a different track for the next 3 years.

Roy was working for the B&O Railroad as a metalsmith when he answered the call to serve his country. Without his parents or girlfriend's knowledge, Roy rode the streetcar to the Baltimore Post Office to enlist in the US Navy.

On July 3, 1942, Roy was sworn in and sent home with orders to be back the next

morning to catch the train for boot camp in Rhode Island. His most memorable memory of boot camp was not the difficulty of the training but the difficulty in learning how to sleep in a hammock!

After 6 weeks of boot camp, Roy was stationed in Norfolk, Virginia's Service School. Here he was trained in welding and metalsmithing. In February 1943, he shipped out on 1 of 14 LCI's (Landing Craft Infantry ship) for Panama.

To this day the trip through the Panama Canal remains a highlight! Of all the world sights he would see, the ride through the Canal still fascinates him.

Ultimately, Roy was assigned to the USS Rigel. He traveled the South Pacific waters and ports in Australia, Fiji, Samoa, Bora Bora, French Polynesia, New Caledonia, New Guinea, Bismarck, Archipelago and the Solomon Islands. All along the seas Roy was welding and repairing US warships. In addition to welding, he maneuvered several LCI's to the shorelines.

Always thinking of his girl back home, Roy mailed an engagement ring home to his parents, who agreed to wrap and give to her. On Christmas day 1944, Mary Van Hollen of Baltimore said, "Yes!"

After a long journey from the South Pacific, Roy arrived in Baltimore in April 1945. Roy was taken by surprise when his father informed him that he was getting married in 3 weeks. He asked his dad how he knew? To which his father replied, "it says so right here in the paper."

On May 5, 1945, Roy and Mary married in St. William of York Catholic Church in Baltimore. Following a wedding breakfast at the Lord Baltimore Hotel, Roy and Mary took a train to honeymoon in New York City. It was a rousing ride full of returning GI's who teased the newly married couple along the way. In New York they celebrated VE Day on May 7th with tens of thousands of jubilant revelers in the streets well into the night. This was beginning of a 68-year marriage until his beloved Mary passed away in 2013.

Roy and Mary spent their first months together stationed in Norfolk, VA until he was discharged on October 7, 1945. In February 1946, the first of 8 children was born. As of February, 2022, Roy's legacy has expanded to 56 grand and great grandchildren, all of whom know and love their grandfather.

Roy has been a devoted husband and father, draftsman, mechanic, welder, fisherman, gardener, artisan craftsman, entertainer, a cook, lay church volunteer, and American Legion member. Even to this day, at 100 years old, Roy loves to learn and spends most of his days reading. His favorite books by far are WWII stories which recall some of the worst and the best times of his life.

We are proud of our dad because he served his country honorably and without regret. As an added bonus for our family, his Navy service is documented in a live interview and archived in the Library of Congress.

We are thankful for the gracious tribute to Roy's service held on June 18, 2022 lead by William Hill and other special Gilchrist Veteran Volunteers. A most special day complete with a thankful prayer, music and songs that saw us through the "great war". As always, dad's infectious laughter lit up the room!

*Louanne Hennessy, Margie Nicholson – daughters*



Roy Hook and his Trademark Smile



Roy and Mary Hook



Gilchrist Team Honoring Roy Hook

## Oscar Baker - A Life of Service

C. Oscar Baker was born in Mount Airy, Maryland in 1922. Oscar graduated from Mount Airy High School 1939 and was drafted into the Army in 1943. After a cross-country train ride, Oscar attended basic training at Fort Lewis in Washington.

Oscar was selected for the Army Specialized Training Program (ASTP); a military training program instituted by the United States Army during World War II to meet wartime demands both for junior officers and soldiers with technical skills. While in the ASTP, Oscar studied at the University of Idaho and the University of Oregon. The ASTP disbanded after manpower for the invasion of Europe was prioritized.

Oscar was assigned to 11th Armored Division B63AIB (Thunderbolts) under Patton's Third Army and sent to England and then France.

Oscar's division advanced to Belgium in the fall and winter as part of the Battle of the

Bulge. During the winter, the soldiers suffered frozen feet and warmed their hands in manure piles. Oscar describes how they entered a small town reportedly empty of Germans in a halftrack in January of 1945. The front of their vehicle was hit by shelling, turning the vehicle upside down. All of the soldiers in the vehicle were killed with the exception of Oscar and one other soldier. Oscar kept in touch with the other survivor and was an honorary pallbearer in absentia when he passed in the 1990's.

Oscar went from a field hospital to the 198th General Hospital in Paris where his fondest memory is of being wheeled to a window when the lights of the Eiffel Tower were turned back on. After several operations on his legs to reset bones and remove shrapnel, he was shipped to England and then to a military hospital in Scotland. Still with casts on both legs, he was put on a troop ship to the states the first of May and was given a Stars and Stripes paper declaring VE Day. Oscar Baker was mustered out in September.

Oscar entered the Federal Fire Service in 1948 eventually working at Walter Reed in Washington. He served as the Mount Airy's fire company president from 1952 to 1955 and was recognized for his outstanding service in 2002 at the annual Maryland State Firemen's Association (MSFA) convention, winning the Gladhill-Thompson Award. MSFA named its annual Rookie of the Year award after Oscar and on June 30 of that year, the new fire house was dedicated in his honor.

Oscar is an 80-year member of the Mount Airy Volunteer Fire Company, a 67-year member of Calvary United Methodist Church, and past president of the Maryland State Firemen's Association.

Oscar retired in 1974 and went to work part time with Carroll County Government where he worked to implement 911 and other upgrades to fire and emergency services. He also served in volunteer positions in Mount Airy government and was a 70-year active volunteer with the Mount Airy Volunteer Fire Department (MAVFD). Oscar is a Past President of the MAVFD, a member of the Carroll County Fireman's Association, the Maryland State Fireman Association, and a former instructor with the University of Maryland fire extension service.

Oscar Baker married Edith Kemp in 1947. They had three sons: Glenn of Easton Maryland, Jerry of Mount Airy, Maryland and Dennis of Roseville, California.

On Friday, June 24<sup>th</sup>, a team of Gilchrist military volunteers were part of a celebration of Oscar Baker's 100<sup>th</sup> birthday at Lorien Mt. Airy. There were about 60 people in attendance including family, friends, and Mount Airy Mayor Lawrence G. Hushour. The Gilchrist team presented Oscar Baker with a We Honor Veterans pin from the Veterans Administration and a certificate from Gilchrist.

One of the Gilchrist volunteers commented that it was an honor to salute a veteran who devoted his life to serving his community and country.



Oscar Baker During WWII



Oscar Baker with Gilchrist Veteran Volunteers

## Veterans History Project

The Veterans History Project of the Library of Congress American Folklife Center was created by the United States Congress in 2000 to collect and preserve the firsthand remembrances of U.S. wartime veterans. Its mandate ensures future generations may hear directly from those who served to better understand the realities of war. It is a special project of the American Folklife Center, a research center of the Library of Congress.

Gilchrist facilitated the recording of interviews for the Veteran History Project (VHP) for a few years through Boys Latin School of Maryland. Students from the school would interview veterans and the recordings would be sent to the Library of Congress. Interviews were halted for the past several years due to the pandemic. Beginning in April of 2022, Gilchrist is once again recording interviews with veterans. These interviews are being recorded by a team of Gilchrist staff and veteran volunteers.

Our first VHP interview was recorded on April 26, 2022 with Brigadier General Sean M. Casey (Retired). General Casey described his years of military service in the Air Force and Army National Guard. Much of the interview focused on his service when assigned to Baghdad, Iraq. Sean is also a member of Gilchrist's We Honor Veterans Task Force.

Here is the link to the Veterans History Project home page. Click on the "Search the Veterans Collections" to access the large number of veteran interviews and documents:

[Veterans History Project \(Library of Congress\) \(loc.gov\)](https://www.loc.gov/veterans)

Sean Casey (right) being interviewed by Vietnam Veteran and Gilchrist Volunteer Mike Lachance



## True North - Honest Stories of Finding Home

True North is a new docuseries about finding belonging at the intersection of people, place, and purpose. The pilot episode (*Sailing to Salvation*) documents a group of distressed war veterans who, feeling alienated from society upon their return from duty, find healing and connection on the Chesapeake Bay.

Michael Wood returned from a combat mission in Afghanistan suffering from PTSD. At the insistence of friends concerned about his state of mind, Mike agreed to resume a pre-war pastime, sailing on the Bay, where he discovered a sense of purpose that had all but vanished. Mike soon realized that if competitive sailing could pull him from the depths of isolation and despair, it may help other veterans as well—and the Valhalla Sailing Project was born. For more information about this important project focused on veterans, go to [Valhalla Sailing Project](https://www.valhallasailingproject.org).

Suzie Galler, True North Executive Producer/Director, recently presented *Sailing to Salvation* to a group of Gilchrist staff and veteran volunteers. Those watching the film were moved by the powerful messages from the veterans participating in the Valhalla Sailing Project.

*Sailing to Salvation* is shown periodically on Maryland Public Television. Here is a clip from the film: [True North Docuseries Shines a Light on the Valhalla Sailing Project - YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...)





## 2023 Welcome Home Vietnam Veterans Day Celebration

Gilchrist's annual Welcome Home Vietnam Veterans Day Celebration is a day to honor and thank the men and women in our community who served during the Vietnam War. This Welcome Home celebration honors the veterans in our care as well as all of the veterans and their loved ones in our community. This celebration is one of the many ways Gilchrist recognizes the unique needs of veterans and thanks them for their sacrifice and service to our state and our country.

The 2022 Welcome Home event was very successful. Here are comments from several of those who attended this special event:

- Welcoming us Vets home has been a great thing to do for us. Some of the stories helped my wife to understand more of what I/we experienced.
- The excitement just seeing my fellow Vietnam Veterans again.
- Thank you for remembering our Vietnam Vets. So many of us are suffering from war related illnesses and this event lets those veterans know that they are not forgotten.

**The 2023 event will be held on Saturday, March 25th.** Gilchrist is excited to announce that our keynote speaker is **Rocky Bleier**, four-time Superbowl Champion and Vietnam Veteran. For more information about Rocky, go to: [Home | Rocky Bleier](#)

Mark your calendar and watch the Gilchrist website (link below) for more information. Go to "Events" and you will see the link to the "Welcome Home celebration."

[Providing care at every stage of serious illness - Gilchrist Cares](#)

You can watch the video of the 2022 Welcome Home Vietnam Veterans Day Celebration on the Gilchrist website:

[Welcome Home Celebration for Vietnam Veterans | Gilchrist \(gilchristcares.org\)](#)

## Mental Health is Health Care

The Military Health System has many mental health resources available to help any service member, families, or veteran beneficiaries who are struggling with mental health challenges.

Military families' lives are generally very different from others. Service members may be subject to frequent relocations, deployments, and stressful experiences due to combat and time away from their families. Families cope with additional stressors when their loved ones are deployed, managing family life on the home front. Traumatic events such

as combat, assault, or disasters can have long-lasting negative effects like trouble sleeping, increased anger, nightmares, anxiety, and alcohol and drug abuse. These factors combined with changes we've experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic may weigh on many.

Everyone reacts to stress and traumatic experiences differently, and while some have reactions that can be seen as normal responses to life events, others may experience signs or symptoms of more serious conditions.

### **You are not alone.**

If you're concerned that you or a loved one may be experiencing mental illness, you are not alone. Mental health is an important part of overall health and well-being, yet mental illness affects millions of people worldwide. Mental health disorders include anxiety, depression, seasonal affective disorder, or more serious illnesses as bipolar disorder, major depression, schizophrenia, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and more. Unfortunately, most people with mental illness do not receive mental health services that they need.

### **Do what feels right for you.**

There isn't one way to think or feel or act. The important thing is to take advantage of all mental health services available to you. Remember that every moment in time can affect you and others differently. Treatment works and it is available.

For more information (including a list of available resources), go to:

[Mental Health is Health Care | Health.mil](#)

## **Veterans Affairs Life Insurance (VALife) Launches in January 2023**

**On January 1, 2023, enrollment opens for VALife—a new VA life insurance program offering increased access for Veterans age 80 and under with any level of service-connected disability (0-100%).**

Veterans who are 81 or older may apply for VALife within two years of receiving notification of a new service-connected disability rating if they:

- Applied for VA disability compensation before age 81, and;
- Received a new service-connected disability rating after turning 81.
- VALife offers the following benefits:
  - Guaranteed acceptance whole life insurance up to \$40,000, available in increments of \$10,000.
  - Premiums will never increase for the life of the policy and are competitive with similar private sector offerings.
  - No medical requirements for enrollment. Due to the absence of medical requirements, there is a two-year waiting period for full coverage to take effect.
  - Cash value that builds over the life of the policy after the first two years of enrollment.
  - Fully automated online enrollment with instant approvals.
  - No deadline to apply for Veterans age 80 and under.

For more information, visit:

[September is National Life Insurance Awareness Month - VA News](#)

## **Uniform Smiles**

*Bobby goes to the local military recruitment center.*

**Recruitment Sergeant:** What would you like to achieve in the military?

**Bobby:** I want to be a General after 2 years.

**Recruitment Sergeant:** Are you insane?

**Bobby:** Is that required?

## Please Share

If you enjoyed reading this edition, please forward a copy to other veterans that you know so that they can also enjoy the newsletter. If you are reading a shared copy and would like to receive your own copy of future editions, please send an email with your request to [wehonorveterans@gilchristcares.org](mailto:wehonorveterans@gilchristcares.org).

## Looking For a Few Good Volunteers

**Would you like to be a Gilchrist volunteer?** We are always looking for volunteers – especially those who have military experience. Our military veteran volunteers are involved in Salute to Service Tributes for veterans under hospice care, visiting public schools to talk about military service, meeting with veterans to talk about their military service, supporting our annual Welcome Home event for Vietnam Veterans, and many other activities.

**If you would like to learn how to become a volunteer**, contact Gilchrist at [wehonorveterans@gilchristcares.org](mailto:wehonorveterans@gilchristcares.org).

## We Want Your Input

If you have suggestions for content you would like to see in future issues of the Gilchrist We Honor Veterans Newsletter, please contact us at [wehonorveterans@gilchristcares.org](mailto:wehonorveterans@gilchristcares.org).



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