

= Frank Buckles =

Frank Woodruff Buckles (born Wood Buckles , February 1 , 1901 ? February 27 , 2011) was a United States Army soldier and the last surviving American veteran of World War I. He enlisted in the U.S. Army in 1917 at the age of 16 and served with a detachment from Fort Riley , driving ambulances and motorcycles near the front lines in Europe .

During World War II , he was captured by Japanese forces while working in the shipping business , and spent three years in the Philippines as a civilian prisoner . After the war , Buckles married in San Francisco and moved to Gap View Farm near Charles Town , West Virginia . A widower at age 98 , he worked on his farm until the age of 105 .

In his last years , he was Honorary Chairman of the World War I Memorial Foundation . As chairman , he advocated the establishment of a World War I memorial similar to other war memorials in Washington , D.C . Toward this end , Buckles campaigned for the District of Columbia War Memorial to be renamed the National World War I Memorial . He testified before Congress in support of this cause , and met with President George W. Bush at the White House .

Buckles was awarded the World War I Victory Medal at the conclusion of that conflict , and the Army of Occupation of Germany Medal retroactively following the medal 's creation in 1941 , as well as the French Legion of Honor in 1999 . His funeral was on March 15 , 2011 , at Arlington National Cemetery , with President Barack Obama paying his respects prior to the ceremony with full military honors .

= = Early life and education = =

Buckles was born to James Clark Buckles , a farmer , and Theresa J. Buckles (née Keown) in Bethany , Missouri , on February 1 , 1901 . He had two older brothers , Ashman and Roy , and two older sisters , Grace and Gladys . Several family members lived long lives ; he remembered speaking with his grandmother who was born in 1817 , and his father lived to be 94 . His ancestry included soldiers of the Revolutionary and Civil Wars .

In 1903 , Frank ? then known as Wood ? and his brother Ashman contracted scarlet fever . Frank survived , but Ashman died from the disease at the age of four . Between 1911 and 1916 , Buckles attended school in Walker , Missouri . Later , he and his family moved to Oakwood , Oklahoma , where he continued his schooling and worked at a bank . He was an amateur wireless operator , and an avid reader of newspapers .

= = World War I and interwar years = =

Five months after the American entry into World War I , Buckles sought to enlist in the armed forces . He was turned down by the Marine Corps for being too small , and by the Navy , which claimed that he had flat feet . He fared better with the Army , which accepted that he was an adult even though he looked no older than his 16 years . A sergeant advised that a middle initial would be helpful , so he adopted his uncle 's name , " Frank Woodruff Buckles " . Another sergeant suggested that the quickest way to the front lines would be to seek a position driving ambulances .

Buckles enlisted on August 14 , 1917 , and went through basic training at Fort Riley in Kansas . Later that year , he embarked for Europe aboard the RMS Carpathia , which was being used as a troop ship . During the war , Buckles drove ambulances and motorcycles for the Army 's 1st Fort Riley Casual Detachment , first in England and then France . He later recalled his service as a doughboy :

" There was never a shortage of blown @-@ up bodies that needed to be rushed to the nearest medical care . The British and French troops were in bad shape ? even guys about my age looked old and tired . After three years of living and dying inside a dirt trench , you know the Brits and French were happy to see us " doughboys . " Every last one of us Yanks believed we ? d wrap this thing up in a month or two and head back home before harvest . In other words , we were the typical , cocky Americans no one wants around , until they need help winning a war . "

Buckles saw the war 's impact on malnourished children in France , and more than 80 years later he could remember helping to feed them . After the Armistice in 1918 , Buckles escorted prisoners of war back to Germany . One German prisoner gave him a belt buckle inscribed " Gott mit uns " (English : God with us) , which he kept for the rest of his life . Buckles was promoted to corporal on September 22 , 1919 . Following an honorable discharge in November 1919 , he returned to the United States aboard USS Pocahontas .

Early in the interwar period , he attended the dedication of the Liberty Memorial in Kansas City , Missouri , in honor of the Americans who died in World War I , and met General of the Armies John Pershing , who commanded the American Expeditionary Forces in Europe during the war . Buckles then attended business school in Oklahoma City , and found work at a shipping company in Toronto , Canada . From 1922 to 1923 , he served with the Seventh Regiment of the New York National Guard in New York City where he also worked in financial services .

Next came a career as chief purser on cargo and passenger ships travelling to South America , Europe , and Asia . In the 1930s , German and British passengers expressed fears about the Nazis , and military officers told him that Germany was equipping for war . Buckles witnessed antisemitism and its effects firsthand while ashore in Germany , and he warned acquaintances in Germany that their country would be brought down by Adolf Hitler , whom he encountered at a German hotel . Employed at sea during the Great Depression , he forwarded an \$ 800 Army bonus to his father who was struggling as a farmer in the Oklahoma Dust Bowl (Buckles provided these details many decades later) .

= = During and after World War II = =

As of 1940 , Buckles had been employed by the White Star , American President , and W.R. Grace shipping companies , and in that year shipping business took him to Manila in the Philippines . After the outbreak of the Pacific War and the invasion of the Philippines , he reportedly remained in Manila to help resupply U.S. troops . He was captured in January 1942 by Japanese forces , and spent the next three years and two months as a civilian internee in the Santo Tomas and Los Baños prison camps .

As a prisoner , he battled starvation , receiving only a small meal of mush served in a tin cup ? a utensil he kept for the rest of his life . With a weight below 100 pounds (45 kg) , Buckles developed beriberi , and led fellow captives in calisthenics to counter the effects of imprisonment . Their captors showed little mercy , but Buckles was allowed to grow a small garden , which he often used to help feed children who were imprisoned there .

All of the captives were freed following a raid by Allied forces on February 23 , 1945 . Before the war he had become fluent in German , Spanish , Portuguese , and French , and by its end had learned some Japanese .

After World War II , Buckles moved to San Francisco , and married Audrey Mayo in 1946 . Eight years later , the couple bought the 330 @-@ acre (1 @.@ 3 km2) Gap View Farm in West Virginia where they raised cattle . Ancestors named Buckles had settled near Gap View Farm centuries earlier .

In 1955 , their only child , Susannah , was born . By then , the world traveller had settled down to a life of farm activities , social events , and serving as an officer (eventually president) of the county historical society . Audrey Buckles died in 1999 , and their daughter moved back to the farm to care for him .

= = Active centenarian = =

After the start of the 21st century , Buckles continued living near Charles Town , West Virginia , and was still driving a tractor on his farm at age 103 . He stated in an interview with The Washington Post on Veterans ' Day 2007 that he believed the United States should not go to war " unless it 's an emergency " . He has also stated that , " If your country needs you , you should be right there , that is the way I felt when I was young , and that 's the way I feel today . "

When asked the secret of long life , Buckles replied that being hopeful and not hurrying were key traits , adding : " When you start to die ... don 't " . In another interview , the centenarian talked about genetics , exercise , and a healthy diet , but put " the will to survive " above everything else .

Buckles joined actor Gary Sinise in 2007 to lead a Memorial Day parade , and that evening his life was featured on NBC Nightly News . With the death of 108 @-@ year @-@ old Harry Richard Landis in February 2008 , Buckles became the last surviving American veteran of World War I. The following month , he met with United States President George W. Bush at the White House . The same day , he attended the opening of a Pentagon exhibit featuring photos of nine centenarian World War I veterans , with Defense Secretary Robert Gates in attendance . That summer , he visited wounded soldiers at Walter Reed Army Medical Center .

Buckles was the Honorary Chairman of the World War I Memorial Foundation , which seeks refurbishment of the District of Columbia War Memorial and its establishment as the National World War I Memorial on the National Mall . He was named ABC 's World News Tonight 's " Person of the Week " on March 22 , 2009 , in recognition of his efforts to set up the memorial . Those efforts continued , as Buckles appeared before Congress on December 3 , 2009 , advocating on behalf of such legislation . He did so as the oldest person who ever testified before Congress . On Armistice Day (i.e. Veterans Day) of 2010 , he made a further appeal :

" We still do not have a national memorial in Washington , D.C. to honor the Americans who sacrificed with their lives during World War I. On this eve of Veterans Day , I call upon the American people and the world to help me in asking our elected officials to pass the law for a memorial to World War I in our nation 's capital . These are difficult times , and we are not asking for anything elaborate . What is fitting and right is a memorial that can take its place among those commemorating the other great conflicts of the past century . On this 92nd anniversary of the armistice , it is time to move forward with honor , gratitude , and resolve . "

Passage of the legislation remained in doubt , because opponents sought relocation of the proposed monument , or alternatively some benefit for the District of Columbia . As of July 2013 , U.S. Senator Pat Toomey was concerned that such a memorial would lead to the National Mall becoming " cluttered " .

A Freemason and longtime Shriner , Buckles was a member of the Osiris Shriners of Wheeling , West Virginia , and he became " the oldest Shriner in Shrinedom " . Other interests of his included genealogy ; he had been a member of the West Virginia Society of the Sons of the American Revolution since 1935 , and was active for many years in the Sons of Confederate Veterans . He was a Life Member of the National Rifle Association .

On February 1 , 2010 ? Buckles ' 109th birthday ? his official biographer , David DeJonge , announced a forthcoming documentary about him , entitled " Pershing 's Last Patriot " , described as a cumulative work of interviews and vignettes . DeJonge estimated a 2011 release for the documentary , and actor Richard Thomas is expected to narrate the film .

In late 2010 , Buckles was still giving media interviews and became a supercentenarian upon his 110th birthday , on February 1 , 2011 .

On February 27 , 2011 , Buckles died of natural causes at his home at the age of 110 years and 26 days . He was the second @-@ oldest living man in the United States at the time of his death (Walter Breuning died 46 days later) .

= = Commemoration and funeral = =

Buckles did not meet the criteria for burial at Arlington National Cemetery as he had never been in combat , but friends and family secured special permission from the federal government in 2008 . That was accomplished with the help of Ross Perot , who had met him at a history seminar in 2001 , and who intervened in 2008 with the White House regarding a final resting place .

Upon Buckles ' death on February 27 , 2011 , President Barack Obama ordered that the American flag be flown at half @-@ staff on all government buildings , including the White House and U.S. embassies , on the day in March when Buckles would be buried at Arlington . Leading up to the March 15 funeral , the governors of 16 states likewise called for lowering their states ' flags to half

@-@ staff .

The United States Senate passed a resolution on March 3 , 2011 , honoring " the last veteran to represent the extraordinary legacy of the World War I veterans " . Concurrent resolutions were proposed in both the Senate and the House of Representatives for Buckles to lie in honor in the United States Capitol rotunda . However , that plan was blocked by Speaker of the House John Boehner and Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid . When asked for explanation , their spokesmen would not elaborate on reasons for the decision . Boehner and Reid instead advocated a ceremony in the Amphitheater of Arlington National Cemetery . Various people had supported a rotunda ceremony , including Buckles ' daughter , a great @-@ grandson of Sir Winston Churchill , and former Republican Party presidential nominee Bob Dole .

Faculty and students at Buckles ' high school in Missouri gathered to honor him on March 8 , 2011 . His home church in Charles Town held a memorial service , attended by the Episcopal bishop of West Virginia , members of Buckles ' family and others . On March 12 , 2011 , a ceremony was held at the Liberty Memorial in Kansas City , Missouri , to honor Buckles and the " passing of the Great War generation " . The keynote speaker was former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Richard Myers .

A ceremony at Arlington National Cemetery 's Memorial Amphitheater Chapel preceded the interment on March 15 . During the ceremony prior to burial , President Barack Obama and Vice President Joe Biden paid their respects and met with the family .

Buckles ' flag @-@ draped coffin was borne to the burial plot on a horse @-@ drawn caisson , and the folded flag was handed to his daughter by United States Army Vice Chief of Staff General Peter W. Chiarelli . Buckles was buried with full military honors in plot 34 , near General of the Armies John J. Pershing . Reporter Paul Duggan of The Washington Post summed up the occasion :

The hallowed ritual at grave No. 34 @-@ 581 was not a farewell to one man alone . A reverent crowd of the powerful and the ordinary ? President Obama and Vice President Biden , laborers and store clerks , heads bowed ? came to salute Buckles 's deceased generation , the vanished millions of soldiers and sailors he came to symbolize in the end .

In Martinsburg , West Virginia , on March 26 , 2011 , a candlelight vigil was held in memory of Buckles . Attendees made donations for a planned statue of him in Charles Town .

In addition to being the last U.S. veteran of World War I , Buckles was the oldest World War I veteran in the world at the time of his death , as well as the last field veteran of the war . Following his death and funeral , there were two surviving World War I veterans , Florence Green and Claude Choules , both of whom served in the British Armed Forces . Choules died on May 5 , 2011 ; Green died on February 4 , 2012 .

= = Honors and awards = =

For his service during World War I , Buckles received , from the United States government , the World War I Victory Medal and four Overseas Service Bars . He also qualified for the Army of Occupation of Germany Medal due to his postwar service in Europe during the year 1919 , and received that medal after it was created in 1941 . Buckles did not qualify for the Prisoner of War Medal , because he was a civilian at the time of his imprisonment by the Japanese .

As a resident of Jefferson County , West Virginia , he was involved for many years with the Jefferson County Historical Society (including as President from 1960 to 1964) . In 1981 , the honor of Emeritus Officer was conferred upon him by that organization .

In 1999 , French president Jacques Chirac awarded him France 's Legion of Honour , for his service during World War I.

In 2007 , the United States Library of Congress included Buckles in its Veterans History Project (VHP) . Information about Buckles ' experiences in both world wars is available from the VHP , including a 148 @-@ minute video interview .

In 2008 , a section of West Virginia Route 9 , which passes by his Gap View Farm home , was named in his honor by West Virginia Governor Joe Manchin . The following month , Buckles received the Veterans of Foreign Wars ? Gold Medal of Merit at the Liberty Memorial . Also in 2008 ,

he sat for a portrait to be displayed at the National World War I Museum . Buckles received the Scottish Rite of Freemasonry 's Knight Commander of the Court of Honour (KCCH) in September 2008 .