

# Mountain Democrat

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 13, 2015

mtdemocrat.com

VOLUME 164 • ISSUE 136 | 75¢

## HONORING OUR HEROES



Democrat photos by Justin Fink  
Never too young to remember those who sacrificed for their nation, Girl and Boy Scouts from local troops show their colors during Veterans Day ceremonies at the El Dorado County Veterans Memorial in Placerville, top photo. At right, members of the California Honor Team of the U.S. Army solemnly march past the crowd on a sun-washed Wednesday morning to honor America's veterans, living and passed.



Democrat photo by Justin Fink  
Police tape blocks access to the Rocky Ridge Road home where two people were shot to death Wednesday evening.

## Mother, son shot dead

**Amanda Williams**  
Staff writer



**MILO WALLACE**

A 49-year-old man was arrested yesterday morning after he allegedly killed his mother and brother Wednesday in the Oak Hill area southeast of Placerville.

El Dorado County sheriff's deputies responded to a 911 call at around 5:15 p.m. on Nov. 11 after a woman told authorities she and her brother-in-law, Milo Wallace, had an argument after he greeted her with a gun at her mother-in-law's home. The woman reportedly told deputies she went to the property at the 3400 block of Rocky Ridge Road after her husband went over to his mother's home to help with repairs and didn't return.

Wallace lived with his

mother at the home, according to sheriff's officials.

Authorities found Wallace's mother and brother dead, one victim was inside the home and the other outside. Their names were not released as of press time.

Wallace was detained for questioning and later arrested on suspicion of two counts of murder and assault

■ See **TWO DEAD**, page 14

## GDPUD preps for King Fire impacts

**Dawn Hedson**  
Staff writer

With sledge, trees and other debris from the King Fire still a concern, the Georgetown Divide Public Utility District Board of Directors voted to use some of its reserves to mitigate any impact on Stumpy Meadows Reservoir and the district's water supply at its Nov. 10 meeting.

Operations Manager Darrell Crevin said 2,800 to 4,000 acres of the Pilot Creek Watershed, which feeds the reservoir, were affected by the King Fire. Most of that land is owned by Sierra Pacific Industries.

SPI has harvested the damaged timber and has taken other measures to reduce soil erosion in the watershed, including contour striping, constructing water bars and installing culverts. In addition, crews have planted two million trees and will plant another 10 million.

However, Crevin said they still anticipate high levels of turbidity in the water entering Stumpy as well as trees and branches floating into the reservoir. A more severe problem is the prospect of Pilot Creek becoming dammed from falling trees and other debris, which could significantly reduce the flow of water into the reservoir.

Staff is already thinking ahead, he said, explaining that if the area gets heavy rainfall they would empty all the water from the system and not let it go through the treatment plant. Instead they would use water from the lake, switching chemicals to an option and GDPUD has an aeration water clarifier at Lake Walton that could be rehabbed and used to settle dirt from the water before it's filtered. They also expect to do more backwashing of the system.

With it unknown when, how much or under what emergency conditions money will be needed to mitigate the King Fire runoff's impacts, the board voted unanimously to use funds in the Stumpy Meadows reserve as needed for remediation efforts without specifying the amount.

GDPUD General Manager Wendell Wall also provided an update on the Auburn Lake Trails

■ See **IMPACTS**, page 14

## Vet helps keep PT boats afloat

**Dawn Hedson**  
Staff writer

"Give me a fast ship, for I intend to go in Jordan's way." — John Paul Jones

A 93 and still full of spirit, Bob Bruckner slipped his whiskey seven and recalled a life that has included serving in both World War II and Korea, helping Navy servicemen earn college degrees and participating in the restoration of a PT boat to mint condition — an accomplishment he still relishes to this day.

One of those selected to be honored at local Veterans Day events this past Wednesday, Bruckner was born in Hamburg, Germany. Still a toddler, he and his family immigrated to the United States in 1924 when they settled in New Jersey.

Once World War II broke out, Bruckner, 30 years old, joined the Navy when he served aboard a PT boat off the Atlantic. Later he was transferred to the West Coast and ultimately ended up overseas as a gunner's mate aboard PT 127.

Calling PT boats "oil and rum ships," Bruckner said their main job was reconnaissance as well



Democrat photo by Shelby Thomas  
World War II and Korean War veteran Bob Bruckner, 93, seen here with daughter Susanna Jones, shares his stories of first serving on and then restoring a PT boat.

as engaging the enemy. They were especially valuable against small enemy crafts and barges.

Only 29 to 40 feet in length and crafted out of mahogany, they carried a small crew of 12 soldiers and two officers. Nicknamed "the mosquito fleet" and "devil boats" by the Japanese, PT boats were fast and maneuverable. They were also armed to the teeth with torpedoes, cannons, machine guns, depth charges, rocket launchers, mortars and smoke screen generators.

Taking on high risk assignments, Bruckner

said his PT crew knew how important each crewman was to their mission and believed their boat was destined to survive. At the same time, Bruckner knew some of his shipmates would never make it back.

"I was lucky my dad came home," his daughter Susanna Jones said.

Bruckner said they were always refueling the boat because they never knew when they'd be sent out again. In particular, he recalled one incident in 1944 that played a part in helping

to end the war.

Part of a group of PT boats sent to the Philippines, he said it was his boat that relayed information back to the American fleet about the size and make-up of the opposing Japanese fleet.

"The other PT boats were silent," he said, adding that the information helped ensure the battle that followed was the U.S. fleet's last major engagement.

With the war over, in

■ See **PT BOAT**, page 15

**100% Home Upgrade Financing!**  
Authorized by El Dorado County  
Obtain Flexible Financing For Energy Efficiency Upgrades  
No FICO Required  
No Payment Until Dec. 2016  
\$1.19 Per Incentive

**GILMORE**  
HEATING • AIR • SOLAR  
566-262-6727

Article in Full:



World War II and Korean War veteran Rolf Bruckner, 93, seen here with daughter Susanna James, shares his stories of first serving on and then restoring a PT boat.

## News

# Vet helps keep PT boats afloat, during and after war

By **Dawn Hodson** Mt. Democrat Newspaper, Placerville, CA 95667

From page A1 | November 13, 2015

*“Give me a fast ship, for I intend to go in harm’s way.”* — John Paul Jones

At 93 and still full of spunk, Rolf Bruckner sipped his whiskey seven and recalled a life that has included serving in both World

War II and Korea, helping Navy service men and women earn college degrees and participating in the restoration of a PT boat to mint condition — an accomplishment he still relishes to this day.

One of those selected to be honored at local Veterans Day events this past Wednesday, Bruckner was born in Hamburg, Germany. Still a toddler, he and his family immigrated to the United States in 1924 where they settled in New Jersey.

Once World War II broke out, Bruckner, 20 years old, joined the Navy where he served aboard a PT boat off the Atlantic. Later he was transferred to the West Coast and ultimately ended up overseas as a gunner's mate aboard PT 127.

Calling PT boats “hit and run ships,” Bruckner said their main job was reconnaissance as well as engaging the enemy. They were especially valuable against small enemy crafts and barges.

Only 79 to 80 feet in length and crafted out of mahogany, they carried a small crew of 12 sailors and two officers. Nicknamed “the mosquito fleet” and “devil boats” by the Japanese, PT boats were fast and maneuverable. They were also armed to the teeth with torpedoes, cannons, machine guns, depth charges, rocket launchers, mortars and smoke screen generators.

Taking on high risk assignments, Bruckner said his PT crew knew how important each crewman was to their mission and believed their boat was destined to survive. At the same time, Bruckner knew some of his shipmates would never make it back.

“I was lucky my dad came home,” his daughter Susanna James said.

Bruckner said they were always refueling the boat because they never knew when they’d be sent out again. In particular, he recalled one incident in 1944 that played a part in helping to end the war.

Part of a group of PT boats sent to the Surigao Straits in the Philippines, he said it was his boat that relayed information back to the American fleet about the size and makeup of the assembling Japanese fleet.

“The other PT boats were silent,” he said, adding that the information helped ensure the battle that followed was the U.S. fleet’s last major engagement.

With the war over, in 1946 Bruckner left the service, went to school and got married. He and his wife had two children and he went to work as a sheet metal worker in Santa Cruz. Bruckner wasn’t out of the military long; he was recalled in 1950 to fight in the Korean War. Stationed in Guam, this time he stayed off the boat and instead ran a sheet metal shop.

“When you’re 19, 20, and there’s a war on, you want to get into it,” he explained. “After I sobered up, I realized that this was a different kind of conflict and I didn’t want people shooting at me any more. I was satisfied to be a supply person.”

Out of the service in 1952, Bruckner went back to work at a sheet metal shop and eventually bought out the owner. After many years running it, he went to work for the California

Department of Corrections in Tracy running a sheet metal training program for the inmates. From there he became the dean of vocational education at Hartnell Community College. Unfortunately, a year later the building where his program was run burned down.

He was then recruited by Gavilan Community College in Gilroy to create an off-campus program for Navy service personnel. That program offered courses and granted college credits to servicemen stationed around the world. A program ahead of its time, through it Bruckner was able to help 50 or 60 servicemen earn their associate's degrees.

### **PT 658 come home**

Bruckner's next big adventure came after he and his wife moved to Portland, Ore. Reading in the newspaper that a group of gray-haired veterans was preparing to restore an old PT boat, he signed up to help. Working on the boat two days a week every week for 10 years, Bruckner, along with other volunteers, painstakingly restored PT 658 to its original condition.

The fact that the boat even existed was something of a fluke, Bruckner said. According to the scuttlebutt he heard, after the war all the PT boats in the Philippines were taken out to sea. Their engines and running gears were stripped and the boats were set on fire to keep anyone else from getting them.

PT 658 never made it into combat. It was deemed surplus property and eventually sold as a pleasure boat to a private owner. But it fell into disuse and ended partially sunk in an

Oakland estuary. With the boat moved to a Navy shipyard in Portland, in 1994 work began in earnest to restore it.

Bruckner said the restoration effort attracted many people, not just veterans.

“People from different trades — carpenters and others helped,” he recalled. “Even a nun showed up on a regular basis to sand and paint.”

A website devoted to the PT boat describes in detail all the thousands of hours that went into replacing the mahogany planks, restoring the propellers and refurbishing the machine guns. (Go to [savetheptboatinc.com](http://savetheptboatinc.com)) To make it historically accurate, even the ticking on the pillows and cups were duplicated. When parts were needed, they scrounged them from another old PT boat.

In 2002 the repairs were completed, but a \$100,000 fire set the effort back another two years.

In 2004 the work was done and the boat was paraded down the Willamette River. Aboard were many of those who had devoted so much time to restoring the vessel at an estimated cost of \$350,000, plus tens of thousands of volunteer hours.

Bruckner was also aboard the boat he gave so much time to.

It's now the only fully operational World War II PT boat in the world and in 2012 was listed in the National Registry of Historic Places. The beautifully restored boat, which Bruckner calls “pristine,” is regularly rolled out at different events, its guns

decommissioned but still fierce-looking as it parades down Portland's waterways.

With the passing of many of the first-generation volunteers, second- and third-generation volunteers have come forward to build a boathouse for the PT boat and to help maintain it.

“You're never finished. There's always something to do,” Bruckner said.

There are also plans to build a heritage museum to house it along with other items from that era.

After participating in that 10-year project, Bruckner moved from Portland to Placerville, where he now lives with his daughter and her family. He also gets to enjoy the company of his six grandchildren and 10 great-grandchildren.

He has been invited to do the honor flight to Washington, his daughter said. But Bruckner seems content to stay put, enjoying his family and the memories of the many contributions he's made personally and professionally.

“Rebuilding of the PT boat was the most satisfying job I've had since WW II,” he said in retrospect.



Dawn Hodson  
Reporter, Mountain Democrat  
[dhodson@mtdemocrat.net](mailto:dhodson@mtdemocrat.net)  
530-344-5071