

Veterans Legacy Program Curricular Materials

Biographies for Middle School Students

John Borris (February 3, 1891-June 11, 1994)

John Borris was born February 3, 1891 in Pennsylvania. He was raised by his mom Anastasia Nussell. He went to school until 4th grade. Then he went to work in the coal mines to help his family.

John was 21 when he joined the US Army in 1912. He was stationed at Fort Hancock in New Jersey. He was in the 136th Company and his job was testing mines. When the US joined World War I in 1917, John's group was part of the American Expeditionary Forces. He was part of the Meuse-Argonne offensive, a very dangerous battle. John was overseas from August 7, 1917 until September 16, 1919.

Although the war ended in November of 1918, many soldiers could not go back home until the next spring. The soldiers had different sports and classes to keep them busy. John got an honorary discharge on September 25, 1919. He went back to the Army in 1921. He worked as a train conductor and a guard and tested mines. He was discharged from the Army in October of 1924.

After this he moved to Chicago. He met his wife Irene. During the Depression, they lived with Irene's parents. In 1931, they had a son named Roger John. John worked as a US Mail Carrier during the Depression. This gave the Borris family relative financial stability.

When World War II broke out, John registered for the draft. He was 51 years old. This draft was called the Old Man's Draft. Men aged forty-five to sixty-four used their skills at home instead of overseas. In 1942 John and Irene had another son named David. They moved to Arizona after the war.

In 1988 John and Irene moved to Lakeland, FL to be closer to their children. Borris passed away on June 11, 1994 at the age of 103. His wife passed away on January 11, 1997. They are buried in the Florida National Cemetery in Bushnell.

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Henry Cavicchi (September 4, 1896 – July 30, 1991)

Henry Cavicchi was born September 4, 1896 in Plattsburg, New York. Both of his parents were immigrants. His father, Ercole, was from Italy. His mother, Elmina, was from Canada. The number of Italian immigrants moving to America in the end of the 1800s and the beginning of the 1900s grew a lot. This was partially because of a loss of jobs in Europe. Many Italian immigrants were poor farmers or laborers who moved to the US in search of a better life. The high numbers of Italian immigrants continued until the Immigration Act of 1924 which made it more difficult to move to the US.

Henry's father, Ercole, moved his family to Massachusetts from New York. He started his own business there in his pursuit of the American Dream. He was very talented at creating new inventions. Many of these inventions were for polishing stone floors. Ercole also had a patent in 1917 for armor to protect ships from torpedoes. This was probably created to protect boats from German submarines.

As a boy, Henry worked in his father's shop. He registered for the draft in June of 1918. He left the Navy in January 1919. He probably did not fight overseas since the fighting stopped two months after he enlisted. He enlisted as an Air Service Aircraft Rigger (ASAR). He worked with planes before they went into action. Planes became an important part of warfare during World War I. Even though they were a fairly new technology, the Navy relied on them for much of their success. In World War II, airplanes would become even more vital to the war effort.

After the war, Henry returned home to Massachusetts. He married his wife, Emily Sussex, in 1922. They had four daughters and a son. Henry continued to work at his father's store, Cavicchi Polishing Machine Co. His father Ercole created at least three new inventions relating to his polishing business, including a mower-like machine used to polish floors. Ercole retired in the 1930s. He lived the rest of his life in St. Petersburg, FL. He died January 19, 1946.

Henry continued to work at Cavicchi Polishing Machine Co with his four brothers. When America joined World War II in 1942 he registered for the draft. This was known as the Old Man's Draft, where older men used their skills for domestic service. The family business allowed Cavicchi to live a comfortable, middle-class life. He retired to Florida with his wife Emily. He passed away July 30, 1991 at the age of ninety-four. Emily died two years later at the age of ninety-one.

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Edward Patrick Connolly (October 31, 1922-September 7, 1995)

Edward Connolly was born October 31, 1922 in Boston, Massachusetts. His parents were named John and Emily. His father worked as a police officer and his mother kept the household together. His father became well known for stopping Harry Shappas, a thief who pickpocketed women. In March of 1930, his father died suddenly. When their mother passed away during the Depression, Edward's sister Anna became the head of household. She worked as a librarian, while some of his other siblings worked as clerks.

When America entered World War II, Connolly enlisted in the US Marine Corps in 1941. Edward went to the Pacific Theater during the war. The Marine Corps was the Navy's primary group fighting in the Pacific. He finished his service December 16, 1945 with the rank of corporal. He was 23 years old.

He returned home to Massachusetts after the war. There he met and married Thelma Snell. They had two sons, Kevin and Mark. Edward followed in his father's footsteps and became a police detective. In 1955, he was wounded while stopping a robbery of the Astor Theater. Even though he was hurt, he was able to stop the gang members who were trying to rob the theater. After this incident, Connolly decided to retire from the force. Boston hailed him as a hero for this act, and even gave him a monthly pension for his actions. He retired and moved to Ft Lauderdale, Florida and then Brevard County in 1982. He passed away on September 7, 1995 and is buried in the Florida National Cemetery in Bushnell.

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Rufe Goins (September 23, 1894 - December 25, 1988)

Rufe Goins was born on September 23, 1894 in Tennessee. Rufe had seven siblings. He was the second youngest child. Rufe was raised on a farm and learned to read and write. On May 29, 1912, at the age of 21, Rufe joined in the United States Army. While Rufe was in the Army, America and Mexico were fighting a war against one another. Rufe was honorably discharged on May 28, 1915. After being honorably discharged, Goins worked as a coal miner in Jasonville, Indiana. When America joined World War I, Rufe signed back up for the Army.

After World War I was over, Rufe went back to Tennessee and got married. During the Great Depression, Rufe worked at the Gary Works U.S. Steel Mill. Rufe had two children, both boys. The Goins family remained in Lake County, Indiana through the 1950s. They moved to the city of Hammond sometime before 1952, where Rufe worked as a blacksmith.

It is possible that Goins moved to Tampa to retire, since he was 65 at the time of their move. While living in Tampa, Maude Goins, his wife, worked as a homemaker and was a member of the Tampa Baptist Church.

Rufe Goins died on December 25, 1988, in Tampa, Florida, at the age of 94. He was buried at Florida National Cemetery in Bushnell, Florida, on December 28, 1988. His wife, Maude, died ten years later and is buried with him.



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William Otto Grupp (April 1, 1901-November 17, 1988)

William Otto Grupp was born April 1, 1901 in Brooklyn, New York. William's parents were born in Germany. On July 5, 1918, William Otto Grupp signed up for the United States Navy at the age of eighteen. During William's service, he sometimes worked in the hospital and one time helped transport mules. He was sent home on June 14, 1919. The family kept the name Grupp, a German name. During this time in America many Germans tried to fit in sometimes this meant learning a new language, changing dress, or even changing names.

In 1921, William got married and had two daughters. After 1940, William went to work for a famous German drink company. Working for this company allowed William's family to be proud of their German background. William worked for this company until he retired and moved to Florida. William died in 1988 Florida. Both William and his wife are buried in the Bushnell National Cemetery.

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Archie Hawkins (February 12, 1902 - February 27, 1989)

Archie Hawkins was born in a city in north Florida about forty years after the end of slavery. As a young boy, Archie worked on a farm and was unable to read and write. When America joined World War I, many African Americans wanted to join in hopes that they would gain more rights and liberties by serving their country. Archie tried to join the military twice. At this time, a person had to be twenty-one to serve. Because Archie was too young, he had to change his birth date two times to be selected. On September 26, 1918, Archie was drafted, or selected to serve in the military.

Archie was sent to an all-black unit in Jacksonville Florida. His unit never saw war. Archie faced disease and workplace dangers in the camp. During his three months of service Archie learned how to read and write. Archie was sent home on December 14, 1918 with the end of World War I.

After the war, Hawkins along with other black veterans, faced hate from the community. The summer after the war was full of violence, racism and discrimination that came to be known as the Red Summer. A “Welcome Home” reception held on September 25, 1919 claimed to be “free to all men in uniform,” yet, African American veterans were excluded from the event and Archie was turned away.

Archie faced many obstacles after the war ended. He moved to St. Petersburg in 1929, where he worked as a landscape gardener until he retired. Archie had a daughter named Doris Washington who had eight children, ten grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren. Hawkins died on February 27, 1989 in Pinellas County, Florida and is remembered at Florida National Cemetery in Bushnell, Florida.

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Earl J. LaPan (August 24, 1908 - February 19, 1996)

Earl J. LaPan was born in Massachusetts on August 24, 1908. LaPan became a famous artist in Florida. many of his works still on display in southern Florida. his career as an artist began in New Jersey, Earl LaPan moved to Florida to work through the Great Depression painting. he made hundreds of works of art throughout the hotels of Miami.

During the Great Depression, artists benefitted greatly from New Deal policies such as the Federal Art Project. during the Great Depression, Earl LaPan created over 300 murals of tropical scenes.

Earl LaPan's work as an artist came to a pause when he was drafted into the Army Air Corps. After World War II, Earl LaPan married Alice Pearse in Miami. There, he went back to work as an artist. One of his most famous pieces is The Mariner, a fourteen-foot statue created for the Mariner Bank which cost \$18,000. After the bank closed, the statue was moved to Phil Foster Park.

Another statue created by LaPan was two bucking horses, standing ten feet high, and weighing one ton. Because lack of repair, one of the horses fell during a storm in 2005, and the other was deemed a danger to the community so the entire statue was replaced a year later.

Earl J. LaPan served his country in World War II, but he went on to become a famous sculptor and painter after the war. The murals and statues that he created are now becoming eligible as historic landmarks, and will ultimately be a legacy that he leaves behind.



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Peter Nadzeika Sr. (January 5, 1919 - January 1, 1996)

Peter Nadzeika was born in New Jersey in 1919. Both of Peter's parents were immigrants from Lithuania. Peter had two older brothers, John, and Frank. Peter worked as a textile worker, a farmer, and even worked at his parent's tavern. During the Great Depression Peter's family relied on their farm. to make money the family would sell goods to people who lived in the city. Peter graduated high school and when he was twenty-two he joined the military. After the war Peter moved to Florida and raised a family. Peter is now at the Florida National Cemetery where his family can still visit him.