

Red arrows

Widows continue infantrymen's traditional reunion

By Paul Winegardner
staff writer

With 350 members of the Red Arrow Club gathered at the Michigan Inn, Southfield, for their 66th annual reunion Friday, it's sure many memories will be joining them.

As with any such gathering, however, the memories are a mixture of both happiness and pain. And for those attending their first reunion without their spouse, the event can be doubly painful.

Many of those planning to gather at the Michigan Inn to commemorate the contribution of the 32nd Infantry Division made during two World Wars will be attending alone for the first time. Better known as the Red Arrows, the 32nd is made up of servicemen from Michigan and Wisconsin and gathers annually on an alternating basis.

Several social events are planned for the three-day reunion, but the event most telling on members now alone is the two-hour memorial usually held on Sunday.

To the military ballad, "My Buddy," all registered members place a poppy in a specially designed urn. The poppies signify the servicemen is no longer living.

For a wife used to placing the poppy in the urn at her husband's side in memory of someone else, the service can be unbearable.

Burnetta Schaffer, formerly of Southfield, is one of those wives.

"I CAN withstand the band playing throughout the service, but when they start in on 'My Buddy' it gets to me so much I have to leave," said Schaffer.

This is Schaffer's fourth reunion without her husband, Lt. Col. Edmund Schaffer. Schaffer is now president of the ladies auxiliary and says the women supply support among themselves when one of the men dies. She also feels it is a duty to continue with the Red Arrow.

"You're a life member after all. Just because my husband is gone doesn't mean I shouldn't continue, does it?"

She also feels her husband would be proud

of her for taking on the post of president. Mr. Schaffer was president of the Red Arrow Club just two days before he died in June 1979.

Wanda Cusmano's feelings run along the same lines as Schaffer's, though the widow of Sgt. Anthony Cusmano puts the dedication to her friendships from the Red Arrow reunions along side that of her husband.

"Of course, it's not the same without Tony," she said. "But I don't want to forget all the people we met through the years. We always enjoyed our time at the reunions, and I want to help in any success the reunions have."

THIS IS Cusmano's fourth reunion since her husband died and although she felt a little sheepish attending in 1980 without him, the friendships are so strong that it would be hard to stay away for very long," she said explaining the closeness of the group. Cusmano is also a former Southfield resident.

Both Lt. Col. Schaffer and Sgt. Cusmano served during World War II. The Red Arrow

Club is made up of veterans of the South Pacific in World War II, as well as those who fought in Europe in World War I.

Clarebell Oehmke has been attending reunions of the Red Arrow club since well before World War II. Her husband, Cpl. John Oehmke, wounded in France during World War I, was one of the original members of the club. He died in 1967.

Oehmke, a lifetime member, recalled her first reunion without John.

"Of course you try to make it easier for yourself, but the feeling is always there," she said.

Asked why she continues to attend if the reunion only reminds her of husband, she replied, "We just have that togetherness."

This year's event includes an open house party for all registered club members and the memorial service on Sunday with guest speaker Brig. Gen. Stanley Wilk of Lathrup Village. The ladies hold their luncheon Saturday with the annual meeting to follow. Ladies only, of course.

Detroit Tiger veteran dies in Redford

By Bill Casper
staff writer

Richard "Dick" Cummings Wakefield, known as baseball's first "bonus baby" after he signed with the Detroit Tigers for \$51,000 and a new Packard in 1941, died last Monday at his Redford Township residence. He was 64.

The post-baseball activities of the former Tiger star are not as well documented as his celebrated signing bonus and his baseball career. But friends and acquaintances knew him as a popular person who loved to bet on horses and play pool. He could be seen almost daily at Detroit area race tracks.

After his baseball career ended, he took on a variety of promotional and sales-type jobs but his first love appeared to be the ponies.

People who knew him say that no one ever had aunkind word to say about him. "He was extremely well-liked by everyone — a real gentleman," said one friend.

"He lived the good life," said long-

time friend Larry St. Aubin, who met Wakefield at the Detroit Race Course. "He was more-or-less semi-retired. He had some money and he was receiving Social Security plus his American League pension."

"DICK HAD many friends, including many big-name people in business, entertainment and politics. He was friends with (former Wayne County Prosecutor and newly appointed Racing Commissioner) William Cahalan and several federal and circuit judges in Detroit."

"He was friends with (comedian) Buddy Hackett. President Ford sent him a Christmas card."

"Dick had a wonderful personality and was very generous," St. Aubin said. "He gave a lot of his money away. We used to kid him that he was a soft touch. He helped everyone he could in his lifetime. He helped (current Tiger) Kirk Gibson with his hitting. Dick told Gibson that he was lunking at pitches and advised him to stay back and wait on the ball."

School starts next week

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Schulman said that other changes planned this school year include using computers to do all the scheduling of the students at the three high schools. Last year, computers did the scheduling at Harrison while at the other high schools students selected their own schedules in a time-consuming process in the gym.

AN "AVANT GARDE" program in critical thinking, a pilot program at Gale Elementary last year, will be expanded to most of the elementary and

middle schools, he said. And a latch-key program run in conjunction with the YMCA has been expanded to eight of the elementary schools with a goal of getting it into all 11 elementary schools.

School will start in an atmosphere of labor peace. The teachers are beginning a two-year contract, according to Schulman, and the secretaries and custodians have three-year contracts. "The bus drivers haven't settled, yet, but we have an agreement with them to open anyway," said Schulman. "I'm sure we won't have any problem with the negotiations."

"Heaven has just improved with his arrival there. That's the kind of guy he was."

WAKEFIELD WAS an outstanding baseball prospect when he played for the University of Michigan. A Chicago native, he graduated from Kelyn Park High School in Chicago, attended U-M on a baseball scholarship, was a member of the Phi Gamma Delta Fraternity and graduated from U-M with a degree in economics in 1939. He is a member of the U-M Sports Hall of Fame.

After signing with the Tigers, he played about a year in the Detroit farm system before joining the big league team near the end of the 1941 season. Wakefield's first full professional season with the Tigers came in 1945, when he hit .316 and led the league in hits (200) and doubles (58).

He served in the U.S. Navy, seeing active combat duty in the South Pacific, during the first half of the 1944 season, but returned in time to hit .335 and lead the last-place Tigers to a second-place finish, falling a game behind the old St. Louis Brown.

AFTER BATTING just 268 in 1946 and 209 a year later, Wakefield was traded to the New York Yankees, where he remained until the end of the 1951 season. He played briefly with the New York Giants in 1952, then left the majors.

He finished with a career batting average of .293 in 638 major league games, compiling 56 lifetime home runs and 315 lifetime runs batted in.

Mary Ann Hansen, a friend of 17 years, said, Wakefield "was at the track every day. And if he wasn't there, I knew I could reach him at the Casino and Cue in Oak Park where he played pool regularly."

Hansen, a bar tender at Mitch House's restaurant in Livonia across from the Detroit Race Course, said, "He always came in from the track. He would have his good days and bad days. He had a good day Friday. He won \$100 and bought dinner here for a horse doctor friend."

WAKEFIELD WAS not about to allow a worsening heart condition to keep him from the life he loved, friends said.

He had just returned Aug. 19 from Veterans' Administration Hospital in Ann Arbor, where he underwent eight days of diagnosis of his heart condition, Hansen said.

A large gathering of his former teammates and local dignitaries, including Tiger general manager James Campbell and other team officials, were expected at local funeral service at Redford's Charles R. Step Funeral home.

His body will be taken to the Cleveland suburb of Avon Lake, where his brother Howard resides, for funeral services and burial in Resthaven Memorial Garden Cemetery, a military burial ground in nearby Avon.

Wakefield is survived by two other brothers, Robert and James, both of Denver, Colo., four nieces and seven nephews.

6 vie for council

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On Nov. 5, voters will be electing candidates to fill the seats currently held by Mayor Jan Dolan and council members Jodi Soronen, Ben Marks and Charles Williams.

Dolan, Soronen and Marks are seeking re-election. Williams announced earlier this year he would not seek re-election because of poor health.

The three highest vote-getters in the Nov. 5 council election will serve four-year terms. The fourth-place winner will serve a two-year term.

Candidates are:
• Dolan, 30324 Wicklow Road, Briarcliff Drive.
• Marks, 25187 Springvale.
• Soronen, 35546 Springvale.

• Jonathan Grant, 31863 Kingswood Square.
• Terry Sever, 34436 Beechwood Drive.



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