

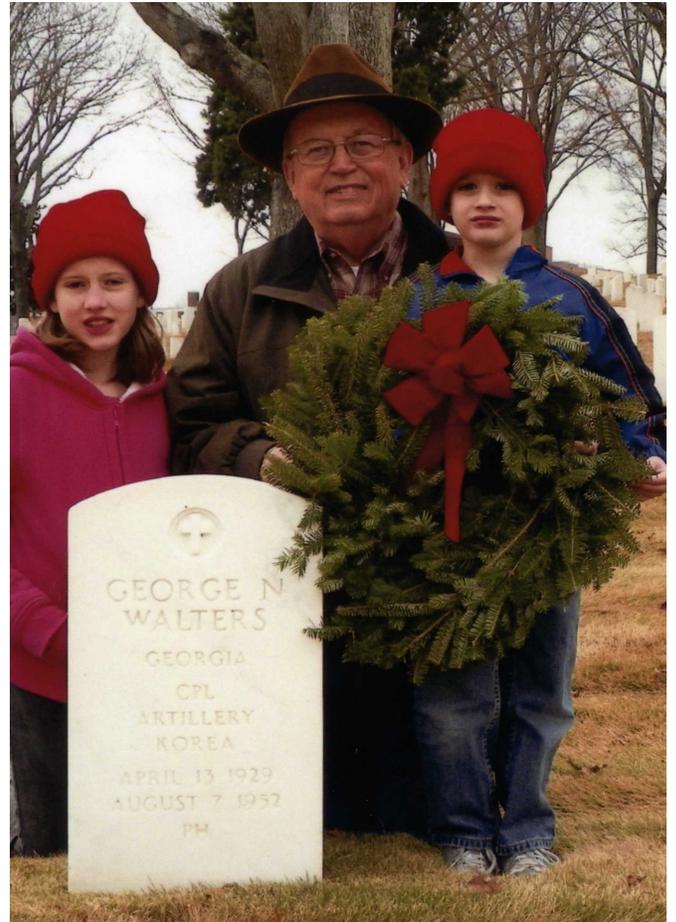
A SIMPLE WREATH AT CHRISTMASTIME

By James Walters

During my life I have been involved with many religious, civic, and veteran's organizations, providing thousands of volunteer hours for various events and activities. For the previous decade, however, my primary passion of charitableness, other than my church, has involved the *Wreaths Across America* program, a non-profit group founded almost twenty-five years ago by Morrill Worcester of the Worcester Wreath Company in Maine.

My involvement with *Wreaths Across America* (WAA) actually began as a small boy, long before WAA or its parent company were founded. I have ancestors back to the American Revolution who donned the uniform of our country. They include a great grandfather who was in the Civil War, my father – who was 50 when I was born – was twice wounded in WWI, an uncle who was killed in the Battle of the Bulge during WWII and my oldest brother who was killed during the war in Korea. My parents often told my sister and me stories of them and their sacrifice. I shared their grief as we visited graves in rural churchyards and national cemeteries, often leaving floral arrangement with our prayers. My parents taught me many things, but most importantly, left me a legacy of love of God, family and country. Jeannie, my wife of 45 years, and I carried forth that tradition with our sons and are now passing the torch to our grandchildren through the WAA program.

In 1999 I buried a good friend, who was a retired army officer and highly decorated, two-tour Vietnam helicopter pilot, at Arlington National Cemetery. Soon thereafter I became acquainted with the WAA program through newspaper articles, stories and photos on the internet and TV news broadcast. Jeannie and I made yearly donations to the program. We contracted for the printing of and helped distribute thousands of donation cards to purchase wreaths. We encouraged others to do the same. With the help of our sons and their families, and hundreds of other volunteers, there were over 14,000 wreaths placed at four national and state cemeteries in Georgia and Tennessee last Christmas season. The second Saturday in December is truly heartwarming as one looks across a cemetery to



Bailey and Matthew with Granddaddy at Marietta National Cemetery — December 15, 2012 .

observe green wreaths with their red bows - as if sentinels were keeping watch over every headstone of a veteran laid to rest.

Several friends, relatives and I, made a pilgrimage from Atlanta to Arlington National Cemetery in December 2009 to help with the wreath program. There we united with thousands of other volunteers to assist with the placement of 15,000 holiday wreaths on graves that overlook our nation's capital. My eyes welled with tears as I observed all those citizens, gathered for a united purpose, hearing the words of a Gold Star Mother say that she was profoundly grateful and truly moved to know that fellow citizens will assemble each December at a cemetery to remember

WAA...Continued on Page 5

WAA...Continued from Page 4



Andrew and Abby Walters (r) with friends Maclain and Tate Riley at Nashville National Cemetery, December 15, 2012

the sacrifice of her son and those like him. At that moment, although saddened by her loss of a son, I gave thanks to God for the privilege of being an American.

More recently though, in January 2011, Jeannie and I had the opportunity to acquaint our four grandchildren with the wreath program. A young warrior had been killed in Afghanistan and was to be laid to rest the following week at Georgia National, a few days after a rare but beautiful six inch snowfall. We wanted to take two of our grandchildren to observe how U. S. Marines offer a final goodbye to one of their own. Upon arrival, and to our surprise, the wreaths were still reverently in place against the headstones from their placement a month earlier. Not only did the children observe the precision of a military funeral, they discovered the beauty of thousands of wreaths in the snow at a veterans' cemetery in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains. A memory forever.

Later that year, and again in 2012 and 2013, wreaths were ordered for each of our grandchildren and some of their friends, and Jeannie and me. Observing the reverent emotion of youngsters as they paid homage to a veteran with a simple wreath is a powerful experience for anyone. And with that good deed of volunteerism, the children have made the world a little better place, and perhaps obtained some satisfaction in knowing that being part of something bigger than themselves is the best work of life.

From all of us who volunteer to assist the *Wreaths*

Across America program through Post 134, please make a tax deductible \$30.00 donation for two wreaths to WAA/Georgia National Cemetery before the end of October. **Please use cemetery code: GANCCA/GA0023**, and mail to: Wreaths Across America, P. O. Box 249, Columbia Falls ME 04623 or ask a Post 134 member for a donation card. By using the Fundraising Group Code, for every two wreaths purchased, the Worcester Wreath Company will kick in a third wreath for free.

(Example is for Georgia National Cemetery (Canton). You may donate to any sponsored cemetery, in any state of your choosing. Georgia has over 20 participating cemeteries).

Donate online at www.wreathsbacrossamerica.org

CLICK ► **SPONSOR** **LOCALLY** ► FIND A FUNDRAISING GROUP (GA0023) **SEARCH** ► SEARCH RESULTS—**DONATE** ► ENTER GIFT AND PAYMENT INFO ► **NEXT** ► **REVIEW** ► **PROCESS.**

An amateur photographer and U. S. Navy veteran, James is a 30 year member of the American Legion and a proud member of Post 134. He was a recipient of the 1991 George Washington Honor Medal for Community Service from the Freedoms Foundation, Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, and in 1995 received the Georgia Municipal Association's "Community Leadership Award." Mr. Walters is a 1972 graduate of Gupton-Jones College and a retired funeral director from A. S. Turner & Sons Funeral Home and Crematory in Decatur. James is currently a consultant for Henry Funeral Homes and Cremation Services in Lithonia and Social Circle. He is a volunteer at Georgia National and a member of its Citizen Advisory Board. Several of his articles regarding the wreath program have been published in numerous magazines and newspapers. James and his wife live in nearby Snellville and have two married sons and four grandchildren. You may contact him at: jameswalters@reagan.com or 770-979-4556.

