

■ Sweetgum

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the world. The Japanese wanted to take it because of its nearness to Australia. They could build airstrips on the island to launch planes against Australia, and use Port Moresby for their ships and submarines. Possessing Australia would greatly increase Japan's military capabilities throughout the Pacific.

It is easy to understand how important New Guinea was to the Japanese by realizing that they tried to take it for over three years. For a very particular and personal reason, Jessie was the most alert scout who ever served on New Guinea, and that came about during his original indoctrination on the island.

Before going on his first scouting exercise with another soldier, their officer told them about the hazards on the inland. After describing the viciousness of the Japanese soldiers, the officer mentioned something that sent shivers up Jessie's spine. He spoke of the twelve identifiable species of cobras on the island.

Jessie had been with W.C. when he was bitten by the coral snake and had helped carry him home. Someone had gone to Toxey for Dr. Rudder, but by the time that the doctor reached the house, blood was gushing from every pore of W.C.'s small body. He really was just a mass of suffering and bleeding flesh. After examining the lad, the doctor had his suspicions. He asked the boys

who were with W.C. to go back into the woods where the lad was bitten and bring back the dead snake. When they returned with it, the doctor's suspicions were confirmed.

He told the family that the very small snake was a coral, and that its venom working directly upon the central nervous system. In effect, the venom produced a paralysis throughout the body. There was nothing that the good doctor could do, for the venom was like that of the cobras in the Pacific and African realms. Jessie watched as W.C. slipped into a deep coma and passed away. Incidentally, you can gain a good understanding of the cobra and the nature of its bite by reading about St. Paul's encounter with one in Acts 28.

Jessie's fear of snakes from the time of W.C.'s death was almost without bounds. When he learned about the cobras on New Guinea, he silently vowed that he and his fellow scout would never be asleep in the jungle at the same time.

The procedure that developed between the scouts and their officer was very simple. The scouts would determine the direction and speed of the enemy and alert their officer about the enemy's position. The pace of travel was always very slow because the island was actually one huge mass of tropical jungle, and the only way through it was on foot. The Japanese usually attacked at night, and fell back into the jungle at daybreak to avoid being detected by Allied bomber crews.

After only a few weeks

on the island, Jessie and his fellow scout spotted a large unit of enemy soldiers who were bearing down on the small town of Atati. The town was too insignificant to be of much value, but it was located on a jungle trail that led to Port Moresby. It could also serve as a harboring place for Allied soldiers who had a good reputation among the natives. The Japanese were randomly hated wherever they went because of their reputation for brutality.

The scouts were sent back to their unit to prepare for the attack. Jessie drew duty with two younger men, and they all started digging a foxhole. There was no action before dark, and Jessie detected the fear in the voices of his companions, even as he tried to assure them that everything would be fine.

Jessie had expected to be drafted when he was their age, but that never happened. The family moved to Melvin and the work situation improved because of the war. Jessie met Willie Grace Baker of Melvin and married her after a short courtship. As they were making plans for their future, his draft notice arrived. He told the two men about his life, and that seemed to relax them.

Darkness came, and an hour later, the enemy put their plans into action. As wave after wave of Japanese soldiers rushed toward the town, they drew tough fire from the Americans.

The Japanese regrouped and tried a new tactic which involved charging the foxholes and lobbing grenades into them. In the darkness, the

enemy was safe from American fire. Jessie stayed near the back of the foxhole and gave his companions the safer position up front. If a grenade entered the foxhole, it would probably land in the rear.

That is exactly what happened. The fused grenade lit up the foxhole, and the two men up front froze. When the device exploded, it would kill all of them. As Jessie bent and picked it up with his left hand, he realized that there was no way to know how long the grenade had been fusing.

We believe that kindred spirits help a person in such an endeavor, and that the spirit of Washington and his men at Valley Forge cheered for Jessie. Those men with Washington left behind in the snow the prints of their own bleeding feet while a down payment on freedom.

We believe that the kindred spirit of Jefferson who "Swore eternal vigilance against every form of tyranny" was also with Jessie, and that the obscure and forgotten song writer who observed the chaos and confusion of his age and responded divinely with a plea, "Angels Rock Me to Sleep, In A Cradle of Love," was also with Jessie.

Above all, we believe that another kindred spirit bolstered Jessie along and bound the other spirits together with a gentle voice that softly proclaimed: "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."

As Jessie drew back his left arm to throw the grenade, we believe that the hills in Wimberley were a little higher and the valleys were a little greener, and that the creeks and branches sang a little more merrier on their way to the river.

In that moment, Choctaw County never stood taller.

As Jessie released his grip upon the grenade, it exploded. The men with him stared in horror as something with a soft thud fell to the dirt floor — — — of the foxhole.



County official talks with federal lawmakers

WASHINGTON, DC — Choctaw Co. Commissioner C.D. "Budd" Ruffin was in Washington in early March for the annual Legislative Conference of the National Association of Counties. While there, Ruffin told the Sun, he had an opportunity to visit and talk with Alabama Senators Richard Shelby and Jeff Sessions, and Seventh-District Congressman Artur Davis, pictured above, about issues such as roads and bridges, help in solving the federal red-tape issue that is holding up construction on the new 25-bed Critical-Access hospital that Rush wants to build in Choctaw County, any federal help that might be available to re-open McCarty's Ferry boat landing and river park in the Ararat community, as well as for upgrading and keeping open Choctaw County's Airport. Ruffin said the week of meetings was "very productive" and that he tried to represent the best interests of the entire county and not only those of the district in which he serves.



Commissioner Ruffin with Senator Jeff Sessions.



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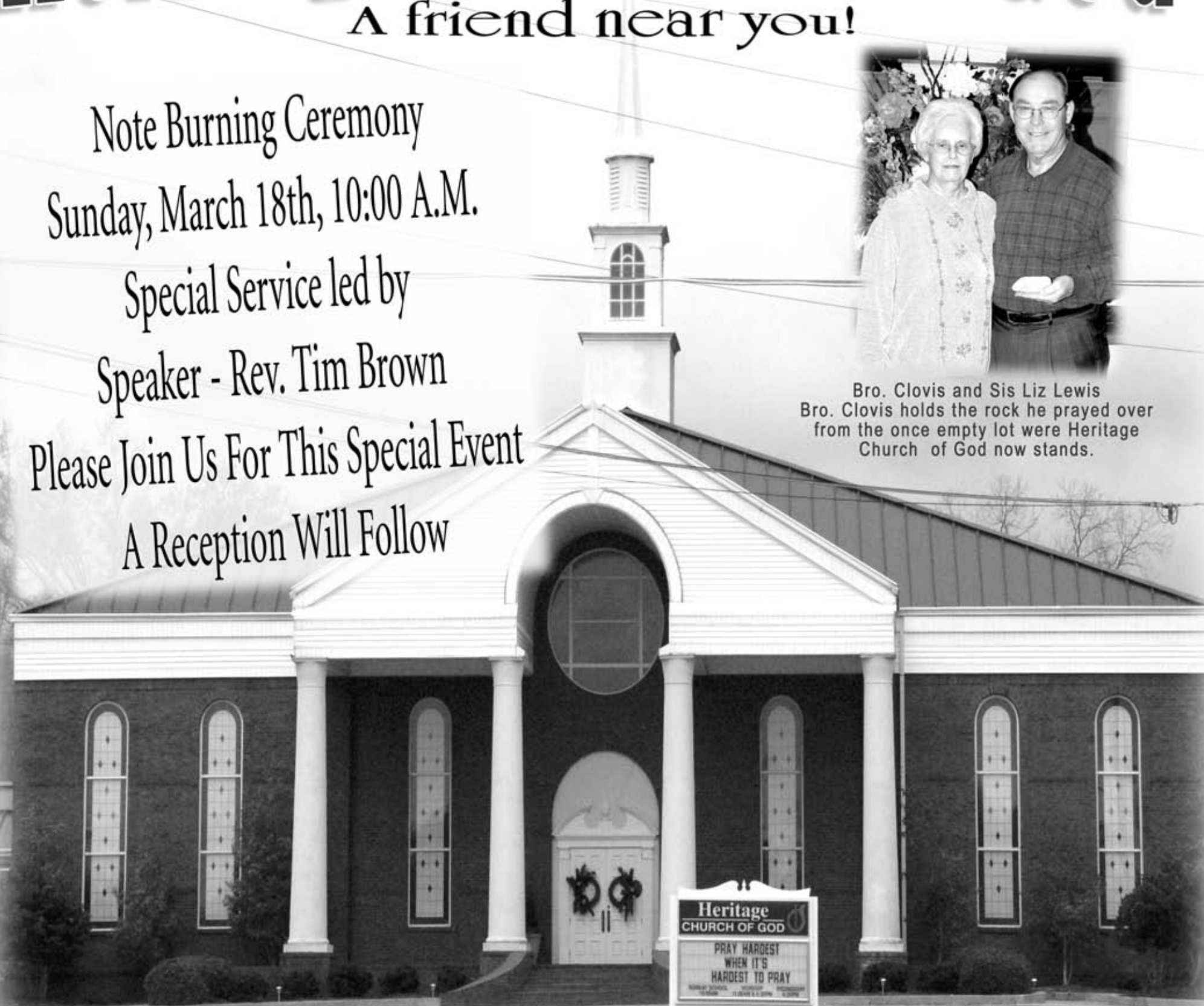
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