



JORDAN GREEN The Blackwell Journal-Tribune

U.S. Navy Rear Admiral Robert Nowakowski hands a folded American flag to Helen Weller on Wednesday during the funeral for her uncle, Rex E. Wise, a World War II veteran killed at Pearl Harbor.

Kansan killed in Pearl Harbor attack laid to rest

BY JORDAN GREEN
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BRAMAN, OKLA.

On what would have been his 100th birthday, a World War II sailor from Kansas killed at Pearl Harbor was laid to rest Wednesday near his former home.

Rex E. Wise was buried beside his parents and siblings at the Braman Cemetery during a military funeral at 10:30 a.m. Officials from the Wichita Navy Reserve gave Wise a three-volley rifle salute and presented the American flag used to cover his coffin to one of his family members.

“It’s just beyond terrific,” said Helen Weller, the oldest of Wise’s nieces and nephews.

Wise was born in Braman on Oct. 14, 1920. He later moved to South Haven, Kansas.

A Navy Fireman 1st Class, Wise was stationed onboard the USS Oklahoma at Pearl Harbor near the Hawaiian island of Oahu on Dec. 7, 1941, when Japanese aerial forces bombed the harbor, the impetus for the United States to enter

World War II. Wise was one of 429 men onboard the USS Oklahoma who died in the attack.

Wise, who was 21 years old at the time, was one of hundreds of sailors at the base whose bodies couldn’t be immediately identified.

Personnel with the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency identified Wise’s remains on Oct. 17, 2019 after examining his dental records and obtaining saliva from his sister, Eunice Wittum.

His remains were delivered to his family and funeral home workers at the Wichita Dwight D. Eisenhower National Airport in Wichita during a ceremony Tuesday, the 245th birthday of the U.S. Navy.

‘HE HONORABLY SERVED’

Dozens of family members, military veterans, firefighters and police officers attended the funeral Wednesday to pay their respects to Wise.

Dressed in his bright white uniform, U.S. Navy Chaplain Daniel McGraw read Wise’s eulogy as the sun shone down on the flag-draped coffin behind him.

“It’s fitting that we’re here today because today would have been Fireman Wise’s 100th birthday, and yesterday was the 245th birthday of the United States Navy,” McGraw said. “It is our admiration and love for Fireman Wise — and our connection to the Navy that he honorably served — that unites us all here today.”

American flags planted in the cemetery by the Braman American Legion Auxiliary Unit No. 259 waved in the wind as recordings of “God Bless America” and other patriotic songs played through a speaker system.

Fittingly, the wind died down when the softest line in “The Battle Hymn of the Republic” played.

“Fireman Wise gave his all, even to the last full measure, for the love and protection of his country,” McGraw said after the song ended. “He stepped up to serve during tumultuous times, and he faithfully kept the watch. His life exemplifies the honor, courage and commitment that we hold so dear. And now, he has finally come home to rest.”

Sailors then performed

the traditional rifle salute. Following the salute, one played “Taps.”

No one spoke as the bugle player held out the last note of the song, a somber ‘C.’

Sailors removed the flag from Wise’s coffin and tightly folded it into a triangle, a tradition at military funerals. A sailor then presented the flag to Weller, 87, one of the few surviving family members who had the chance to meet Wise.

She laid her hand across the flag in her lap, her eyes drawn to the casket in front of her.

Rear Admiral Robert Nowakowski, the acting deputy commander for the Navy Recruiting Command, delivered a message to the family.

“It’s great to be able to remember such a hero that we unfortunately lost over 78 years ago in battle at Pearl Harbor,” he said. “But what I want to do is give you some optimism as well. Last year, the Navy actually recruited about 40,000 new sailors to come in to be a part of the world’s greatest Navy, and I just want to assure you that the legacy of Petty Officer Wise is going to be taken on by thousands of additional sailors that are joining our strong force.”

As the ceremony ended, Weller stepped out from the green canopy at the burial site.

She smiled.

In her words: “I’m thankful that he’s home.”

FROM PAGE 1A BILLS

volved in their care.

The plan to ban these kinds of bills was popular and bipartisan, and it was backed by the White House. It fell apart at the eleventh hour after private-equity firms, which own many of the medical providers that deliver surprise bills, poured millions into advertisements opposing the plan. Committee chairs squabbled over jurisdictional issues and postponed the issue. Then the pandemic struck.

The Pennsylvania patient had no way of knowing that her helicopter, which transported her between two in-network hospitals, did not have a contract with her health insurance plan. Nor could she have known that the air ambulance service, owned by a private-equity firm, faces multiple lawsuits over its billing tactics.

Her health plan, Independence Blue Cross, initially said it would pay \$7,539 of the bill, according to billing documents reviewed by The Times, but then rescinded the money. The patient, housebound because of lingering coronavirus symptoms, was left with the full amount.

“She was intubated and on a ventilator when her providers felt it was necessary that she be transferred,” said Leslie Pierce, a division chief at the Pennsylvania Insurance Department, who handled the complaint that the patient submitted to the agency. “She had no decision in the selection process.”

About 450,000 Americans have been hospitalized with the coronavirus. Even for those covered by robust health insurance, hospitalization can generate significant medical bills. To understand the true cost of coronavirus hospitalizations, and the impact these medical bills have on patients, The Times has been inviting readers to share their bills.

The resulting database, which now includes more than 350 reader submissions, shows that coronavirus patients are encountering the same surprise medical bills that have plagued the health system for decades. While President Donald Trump told the country “not to worry” about the disease after his three-day coronavirus hospitalization, other survivors say the cost of care causes tremendous anxiety at a moment when they want to focus on recovery.

Some patients report feeling overwhelmed by the pile of bills that greets them at home. One-third of coronavirus patients reported an

altered mental state after contracting the disease, according to the largest randomized study to examine neurological symptoms. Many patients struggle to do basic tasks, such as cook or pay bills.

Surprise medical bills happen when patients receive care from an out-of-network provider they did not choose. These charges are common in certain corners of the health system like the emergency room, where 20% of patients are vulnerable to surprise medical bills.

The bills are especially pervasive after ambulance trips: One recent study found that as many as 71% of those rides could result in surprise, out-of-network bills.

“We were shocked to see that,” said Dr. Karan Chhabra, a surgical resident at Brigham and Women’s Hospital and the lead author of the study.

After failing to pass comprehensive billing reform, Congress tried in relief packages passed this spring to shield coronavirus patients from surprise charges. It set up a \$175 billion provider relief fund to aid hospitals and doctors on the front lines of battling coronavirus. As a condition of accepting those funds, medical providers agreed not to send surprise medical bills to their patients.

Many health insurers have promised to cover plan members’ coronavirus hospital stays in full, another effort to hold patients harmless.

But these protections leave significant gaps, as patients are beginning to find. While many hospitals and doctors received provider relief funds, a number of medical laboratories and ambulance services did not. That leaves those providers free to bill however they’d like.

Insurers’ policies that cover coronavirus hospital stays, meanwhile, sometimes do not include the ambulance ride it took to get there — or follow-up care to treat long-term symptoms.

“The government is telling people if you have coronavirus, you cannot get surprise-billed,” Chhabra said. “It’s incredibly counterproductive if people cannot trust the policies meant to protect them when they’re getting care for this illness.”

Air ambulance bills are often the most costly type of surprise medical bills. Chhabra found a median charge of more than \$38,000, leaving the typical patient responsible for more than \$21,000 after the insurance payout. The prices are quickly increasing, too, rising about 15% each year since 2015.

FROM PAGE 1A VOTING

Nov. 3, and received by the election office by Nov. 6.

Those casting advance ballots through the mail should follow all instructions included in the packet provided by the election office. The most common mistakes are voters not signing the outside of their envelopes or ballots not being turned in by the deadline.

Kansas is a voter intent state, meaning if you make a mistake on your advance ballot, you may correct it in writing on the ballot with an explanation that shows what you meant to do. Those ballots will be counted by hand and will be up to interpretation of the board of canvassers, which is the Sedgwick County Commissioner or their delegates.

In the August primary, 254 ballots in Sedgwick County were tossed because of signature problems.

Another 203 votes didn’t count because they arrived late.

Ten were thrown away

for using the wrong return envelope. Another 17 didn’t provide an ID; 205 would-be voters weren’t registered.

Voters can track their advance ballots at myvoteinfo.voteks.org. You can also pull up a sample ballot and check your voting history at the same state website. You can also view a sample ballot and check a candidate’s stance on issues at The Eagle’s voter guide at kansas.com.

Mail-in ballots may be returned in person to the Sedgwick County election office or hand-delivered to any of the secure ballot drop boxes sprinkled throughout the county. Ballots can also be sent through the mail.

Although most domestic election mail is delivered in 2-5 days, the United States Postal Service recommends mailing your ballot at least one week before the deadline.

That means domestic voters should apply for advance mail-in ballots no later than Oct. 20 and send completed ballots no

later than Oct. 27.

If you receive a ballot through the mail, but decide later to vote in-person instead, you may be forced to fill out a provisional ballot, Sedgwick County Election Commissioner Tabitha Lehman said.

“So if you requested a ballot by mail, it’s best to vote that ballot,” she said.

To avoid crowds that could spread the coronavirus, the Sedgwick County Election Office has purchased 14 ballot drop boxes with CARES Act funding passed through the Secretary of State’s Office. Mail-in ballots may be dropped in those boxes until 7 p.m. on Election Day, when the polls close.

The drop boxes are available at several outdoor locations throughout the county:

Wichita

Boston Recreation Center, 6655 E. Zimmerly

Evergreen Park Recreation Center, 2700 N. Woodland

Linwood Recreation Center, 1901 S. Kansas

Orchard Recreation Center, 4808 W. Ninth St.

Sedgwick County Courthouse, 525 N. Main

Sedgwick County

Health Department, 1900 E. Ninth St.

Bel Aire

Bel Aire City Hall, 7651 E. Central Park

Haysville

Haysville Police Department - Court Services, 200 W. Grand

Valley Center

Valley Center City Hall, 121 S. Meridian

Clearwater

Clearwater City Hall, 129 E. Ross

Maize

Maize City Administration, 10100 W. Grady

Derby

Derby Public Library, 1600 E. Walnut Grove Road

Goddard

Fire Station 35, 1535 S. 199th St. West

Park City

Fire Station 32, 7750 Wild West Road

EARLY VOTING STARTS NEXT WEEK

Early voting starts Monday, Oct. 19, at the Sedgwick County Election Office and Intrust Bank Arena.

The week before the election, several other sites throughout the county will open for in-person early voting. Any Sedgwick County voter can vote at any Sedgwick

County early voting site. Voters must bring an acceptable form of photo ID.

Wichita

Sedgwick County Election Office, 510 N. Main, Ste 101

Opens Monday at 8 a.m. Remains open 8 a.m.-5 p.m., Monday-Friday and closes at noon, Nov. 2.

It’s also open 9 a.m.-4 p.m., Saturday, Oct. 31.

Intrust Bank Arena, 500 E. Waterman

Opens Monday at 10 a.m.

Remains open 10 a.m.-7 p.m., Monday-Friday for the next two weeks, except Wednesday when the arena closes at 5 p.m.

It’s also open 9 a.m.-4 p.m., Saturday, Oct. 31.

Free parking is available north of the arena.

Other early voting sites open Tuesday, Oct. 27.

Satellite early voting poll sites open at 10 a.m., Tuesday, Oct. 27, and remain open until at least 5 p.m. the rest of the week. On Tuesday, Thursday and Friday, polls stay open 7 p.m. They are also open 9 a.m.-4 p.m., Saturday, Oct. 31.

Grace Presbyterian Church, 5002 E. Douglas

Machinists Building, 3830 S. Meridian

Progressive Missionary

Baptist Church, 2727 E. 25th St. N.

Reformation Lutheran, 7601 E. 13th St. N.

Sedgwick County Extension Office, 7001 W. 21st St. N.

SEIU Building, 3340 W. Douglas

Sharon Baptist Church, 2221 S. Oliver

St. Andrew’s Lutheran, 2555 Hyacinth Lane

Westlink Church of Christ, 10025 W. Central Ave.

Woodland Lakes Community Church, 770 S. Greenwald Road

Bel Aire

Bel Aire City Building, 7651 E. Central Park

Derby

Woodlawn Methodist Church, 431 S. Woodlawn Blvd.

Goddard

Goddard District Conference Center, 315 S. Main

Haysville

Haysville Community Library, 210 Hays Ave.

Park City

Park City City Hall, 1941 E. 61st St. N.

Valley Center

Valley Center Community Center, 314 Clay

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