

THE SPOKESMAN-REVIEW



Soldiers of the VI Corps, Army of the Potomac, wait in trenches before storming Marye's Heights at the Second Battle of Fredericksburg during the Chancellorsville campaign in Virginia in May 1863.

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

MEMORIAL DAY



Memorial Day originated in 1868 as Decoration Day, thanks to a group of Union veterans of the Civil War. By the 20th century, it honored all Americans who die in military service – more than 1.2 million since the Revolutionary War. We break down the numbers for Washington and Idaho. **NEWS, 6**

MONDAY, May 27, 2019

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Spokane, Washington

WAR AND REMEMBRANCE

Medical Lake's Larry Plager collected hundreds of war stories; Vietnam vet is turning the page



SHAWN VESTAL

SPOKESMAN COLUMNIST



A couple years back, Larry Plager bought the DVDs of the Ken Burns documentary series, "The Vietnam War."

Plager is a 69-year-old veteran of that war. Over the decades, he has read and collected hundreds of books and other materials about the war – photography, history, memoirs, videos. Unlike some of his fellow veterans, who were not inclined to talk about their wartime experiences back home, he would talk about his experiences with, as he puts it, anyone who wanted to ask.

And yet when he went to watch Burns' series – decades after the year he spent as a combat Marine in Vietnam – he found himself unable to sit through it.

"I just didn't want to watch it," Plager said last week. "It was too hard."

At around the same time, Plager had begun writing about his war experiences, composing short pieces of remembrance about his experiences and emotions as a young man at war, about the friends he lost, about interactions with villagers.

Fifty years after he arrived in Vietnam as an 18-year-old Marine, Plager occupies a paradoxical place with regard to Vietnam and remembering.

See **VESTAL, 4**



DAN PELLE/THE SPOKESMAN-REVIEW

Larry Plager, a Vietnam War veteran from Medical Lake, recently donated hundreds of books and materials about the war to the Foley Center Library at Gonzaga University. The materials are on display as part of a grant the university received to tell stories about war.

Below, U.S. Marine PFC Larry Plager in Vietnam in 1969 at age 19.



'IT'S INSPIRING': CITY'S OLDEST CHURCH CELEBRATES 140TH YEAR

Governor, mayor salute Westminster UCC's anniversary

By **Nina Culver**
FOR THE SPOKESMAN-REVIEW

People came from far and wide Sunday to celebrate the 140th anniversary of the Westminster Congregational United Church of Christ, which can trace its beginnings to a log cabin on Sprague Avenue in 1879.

Since its humble origin as the only church in the area, the church has grown to become a congregation that welcomes everyone and is known for its ministry to the homeless and the LGBTQ community. That legacy can be traced to its roots, when the church was founded by both whites and members of the Spokane Tribe.

The current chairwoman of the Spokane Tribe, Carol Evans, was among the roughly 300 people who came to help the congregation celebrate. She told the story of her ancestors and how life changed for them after white settlers moved in.

"My ancestors lived in this area," she said. "This was their homeland."

Gov. Jay Inslee sent a message of

See **WESTMINSTER, 5**



LIBBY KAMROWSKI/THE SPOKESMAN-REVIEW

Members of the choir dance together during the 140th anniversary service at Westminster Congregational United Church of Christ on Sunday in Spokane.

GETTING THERE

Amazon-linked Geiger work is underway



NICHOLAS DESHAIS

SPOKESMAN COLUMNIST



Geiger Boulevard, that sleepy little frontage road hugging I-90 in the West Plains, is about to wake up.

This week, work begins on a two-year, \$66 million project to transform Geiger from its two-lane, patchwork, chip-sealed condition into a three-lane asphalt roadway with a center left-turn lane. Traffic signals and roundabouts are coming. A new bridge over the interstate will be built. New bus stops. A 10-foot-wide path next to the road for cyclists and pedestrians.

The work is directly related to continued construction of the Amazon fulfillment center, which sits right on Geiger, where the roadwork will be done. The \$181 million, 2.5-million-square-foot warehouse is scheduled to be complete in September. Soon after, more than 3,000 people will be employed there. Transit facilities and the pathway may help lessen the traffic some, but that's a lot of commuters. The number of heavy trucks along Geiger

See **GETTING THERE, 5**



NATION / FROM THE FRONT PAGE

'Aladdin' soars in debut weekend

By Lindsey Bahr
ASSOCIATED PRESS

LOS ANGELES—Moviegoers voted with their dollars and chose the familiar over the new this Memorial Day weekend. The Walt Disney Co.'s live-action remake of "Aladdin" crushed the competition at the box office, which included two new original R-rated films that opened as counterprogramming to the family pic: The critically acclaimed teen comedy "Booksmart" and the horror movie "Brightburn."

But the strategy didn't quite work. "Aladdin" did better than expected, grossing an estimated \$86.1 million to take the top spot at the North American box office, according to studio estimates on Sunday. The

others didn't even break \$10 million.

"Aladdin," a musical-adventure directed by Guy Ritchie, stars Will Smith, Mena Massoud and Naomi Scott and draws heavily on the music and story of the 1992 animated film that it's based on.

The top few spots at the holiday box office were populated by known brands and sequels. "John Wick: Chapter 3 – Parabellum," now in its second weekend, placed second with \$24.4 million. "Avengers: Endgame" took third with \$16.8 million, and "Pokemon Detective Pikachu" landed in fourth with \$13.3 million.

Sony's modestly budgeted horror movie "Brightburn" opened in fifth with \$7.5 million.

Box office sales

Estimated ticket sales for Friday-Sunday at U.S. and Canadian theaters, according to Comscore.

1. "Aladdin," \$86.1 million
2. "John Wick: Chapter 3 – Parabellum," \$24.4 million
3. "Avengers: Endgame," \$16.8 million
4. "Pokemon Detective Pikachu," \$13.3 million
5. "Brightburn," \$7.5 million

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LOTTERIES

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 Sunday's Match 4: **2-11-16-17**
 Sunday's Washington Keno: **2-4-5-17-19-20-21-23-29-34-37-43-45-50-51-52-54-60-64-71**

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VESTAL

Continued from 1

Reading and watching the depictions of others can make him profoundly uncomfortable. And yet writing about his own experiences has become a way of turning the act of remembering into a purging, he said.

A lot of his writing sprung from his participation in a two-year program at Gonzaga University called "Telling War," a project that has helped veterans express themselves through storytelling. As the Telling War project drew to a close and as he found himself less interested in delving into other people's depictions of the war, Plager settled on a way to honor the program that was helping him deal with his memories in a more productive way.

He took his boxes of Vietnam books and gave them to GU, where they are now a permanent part of the collection at the Foley Center Library.

"He told me, 'I'm ready to get rid of them. I'm ready to let them go,'" said Lisa Silvestri, a GU professor who oversaw the Telling War project.

'I'd had enough'

Plager was part of the "Evergreen State Platoon" – a contingent of 80 young men from Washington who enlisted in the Marine Corps in 1968 and got a sendoff on the Capitol steps from the governor. He'd graduated from Ferris High that spring. By the new year he would be in Vietnam.

Six of the Evergreen State Platoon would not return home.

Plager served as a rifleman, and eventually earned the rank of corporal. He describes his experiences as long periods of tense inactivity punctuated by chaos and terror.

He returned in January 1970, and eventually started a career as a technologist at local hospitals, including at the groundbreaking heart-surgery lab at Sacred Heart. He and his wife, Marsha, have three sons and three grandchildren.

Plager said that, though he knew plenty of fellow vets who never wanted to talk about their experiences, that his approach was always a little more open. He would talk to people who were curious, he would engage with their questions, he would try to see the movies – like "Platoon" – with others.

But it was always hard. Always haunting.

He had started collecting materials about the war with the Time-Life series "The Vietnam Experience." That 25-volume project started in 1981, with the final volume published in 1988. Plager added other books; the collection grew into the hundreds. He would look at the powerful documentary photography of others, revisit the politics surrounding the war.

But a few years ago, around the same time he was unable to watch the Burns series, he found that looking at the books also became more and more painful. Time wasn't easing his wounds – the wounds that warriors bring home and often carry alone – and revisiting the war through his collection wasn't help-



DAN PELLE/THE SPOKESMAN-REVIEW

Larry Plager, a 69-year-old Vietnam veteran from Medical Lake, views some of his hundreds of donated books and materials about the war Thursday at the Foley Center Library at Gonzaga University.

ing. "I'd just had enough," he said. "I didn't want to watch it anymore. I didn't want to read it anymore."

'All this reckoning'

Silvestri, a communications professor at GU, coordinated and oversaw the Telling War project. The subject of combat and its effects on warriors is both professional and personal for her; she's the author of "Friended at the Front: Social Media and the American War Experience." And her own father and brother served in combat.

The Telling War project – "War Cannot Be Heard Unless It is Told" – was an effort to help veterans find ways to make sense of their own experiences through writing, songs and art. It was funded by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, and run by Silvestri and Rebekah Wilkins-Pepiton, an artist and arts commissioner for the city of Spokane.

Over the course of two years, veterans would gather for presentations and workshops in which they used different mediums and genres to tell stories about their experiences. Authors and artists gave presentations. An anthology of the project has been published, including poetry, prose, interviews, comics and other works created by several local vets.

"When they come home, they have all this reckoning to do. All this sense-making to do," Silvestri said. "We owe it, as a civilian public, to our veterans to give them the space to digest it well."

On Memorial Day, that question of the civilian debt to veterans – how large it is and how little of it has been paid – should take the spotlight. But we live in an era of widespread national forgetting, a time of constant warfare in which many of us don't quite notice, comfortably unaware of the burdens servicemen and women carry in our midst, on our behalf.

Memorial Day is a perfect emblem of this – a day meant for honoring fallen veterans that can sometimes seem like little more than the start of grilling season and the occasion for big sales.

If people hear the stories of Plager and other veterans, it can help punc-

tuat that fog. It might help us be smarter and more wary of current chest-thumping about sending off 120,000 American soldiers to an "easy" war against Iran. The history of the American war veteran suffering the lifelong consequences of disastrously overconfident politicians should be more than enough to make us wary of such hot, overconfident talk – if we would only listen.

Plager attended virtually every workshop in the Telling War project. Silvestri said he helped set an example, especially for some veterans of more recent war, with his positive effort to try and dig into his own war experiences and find meaning – and even a sense of release.

Plager had started writing earlier, as part of the Red Badge Project, one of many programs that use storytelling and art-making as ways to help wounded warriors. That had been suggested to him by his counselor, who was treating him for post-traumatic stress disorder.

Plager also had a friend who was writing a book, and he would send him the occasional email about his own experience. He was discovering that writing about his experiences was more powerful than talking about them; he was finding that in pursuing the craft of writing while shaping his own stories, he had found a way to engage with his memories in a more productive and useful way.

He wrote pieces about fearing death in an intense firefight, and losing friends in battle. About buying suspect "hamburgers" from villagers. About the down times between the chaos. About the napalm that would singe the hairs on his face. About wondering if the Viet Cong soldier he shot on a dark night died. About coming home and visiting the graves of friends on Memorial Day.

He's not done remembering, now that he's donated his books to the GU library. He's just doing it in a different way.

"When I write these things, it does give me a certain calm and peace," he said.

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THE BIRTHDAY BUNCH



Kissinger



Meriwether



Gossett



Schiff



Gilpin



McBrayer



Feldman

Former Secretary of State **Henry Kissinger** is 96. Actress **Lee Meriwether** is 84. Actor **Louis Gossett Jr.** is 83. Actor **Bruce**

Weitz is 76. Actor **Richard Schiff** is 64. Actress **Peri Gilpin** is 58. Comedian **Adam Carolla** is 55. Actor **Todd Bridges** is 54.

Actor **Paul Bettany** is 48. Actor **Jack McBrayer** is 46. Rapper **Andre 3000** (Outkast) is 44. Actor **Ben Feldman** is 39.

PEOPLE

Pelley says complaints to execs led to ouster

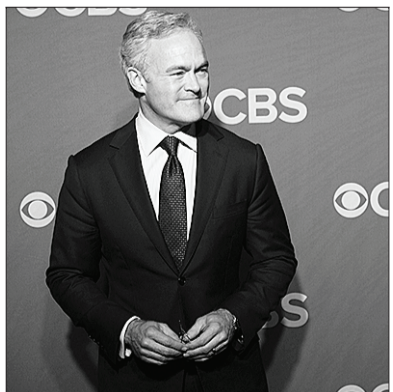
From wire reports

Former "CBS Evening News" anchor **Scott Pelley** says he lost that job because he wouldn't stop complaining to management about the hostile work environment for men and women.

Pelley was forced out of the position in 2017 after six years on the job. The "60 Minutes" correspondent told CNN's Reliable Sources Sunday, however, that things have changed after 18 months of dramatic management changes amid a slew of scandals and misconduct claims at CBS.

Executives who have departed include **Jeff Fager** of "60 Minutes," network news president **David Rhodes**, anchor **Charlie Rose** and CBS Corp. CEO **Leslie Moonves**, who left in September after multiple women alleged sexual misconduct.

When asked to elaborate, Pelley said that four or five years ago he went to the president of the news division, who was then Rhodes, and described the hostile environment. "He told me if I kept agitating about that internally then I'd lose my job," Pelley said. "Having exhausted the possibilities in the news division, I went to the chairman of the CBS Corporation who listened to me very concerned for an hour, asked me



CHARLES SYKES/INVISION/AP

Scott Pelley attends CBS Upfront in New York in May 2013.

some penetrating questions about what was going on ... I didn't hear back from him, but in the next opportunity in my contract I was let go from the evening news."

Now, Pelley said, with the promotion of people including **Susan Zirinsky** to head the news division, the first woman to hold that position, the network is on the right track.

MAN ACCUSED OF DEFRAUDING STAN LEE APPEARS IN COURT

A former business manager of the late comic book legend **Stan Lee**

had his initial court appearance early Sunday in Arizona, where he was arrested after fleeing California charges of fiduciary elder abuse.

Keya Morgan appeared in Maricopa County Superior Court on a charge of being a fugitive of justice. Court documents show Los Angeles police alerted authorities in the Phoenix suburb of Scottsdale that Morgan's cellphone was being used in north Scottsdale.

Morgan, 43, was found in a house with his mother and arrested without incident Saturday morning, police said.

It's unclear when Morgan will be extradited to California, where he's facing felony charges including theft, embezzlement, forgery or fraud against an elder adult, and false imprisonment of an elder adult. A misdemeanor count also alleges elder abuse.

Los Angeles County prosecutors say Morgan sought to capitalize on the Marvel Comic mastermind's wealth and exert influence over Lee even though he had no authority to act on his behalf.

Lee died last November at age 95. Prosecutors say Morgan pocketed more than \$262,000 from auto-graph-signing sessions Lee did in May 2018.

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Larry's Facebook friends regularly receive his Friday jokes, often corny, good in nature, and always good for a laugh. Larry was inspired to write the following to his Facebook friends on Friday, June 14, 2019 after viewing the traveling Vietnam Memorial.

No Jokes Today

No jokes today. I thought, with the Traveling Wall in Medical Lake, I would share one of my memoirs. Some of you have read or heard me read this story before. This is the latest, and possibly, final rewrite.

Listen

Most of the guys said they would never talk about Vietnam when they got home. I said I'd talk to anyone who would listen. I came back home in January 1970. Some of the guys from Spokane I enlisted in the Marine Corps with were already back, a few with wounds leading to discharge, two in coffins. My only wounds were a couple scars from jungle rot, a few close calls, but no Purple Heart. Those guys, who are still alive, we would listen to each other.

After my discharge in May of 1970, I just wanted to go on with my life, leave the war behind, find love, go to college and get a job. While taking English classes at Eastern, I wrote about some of my experiences. Sometimes, someone asked me questions and wanted to listen.

By 1980, I worked at a hospital and at times my co-workers and I stopped at a nearby tavern for drinks after work. Others in our group spent time in the Navy, Army, Air Force and Coast Guard and we shared stories of our experiences. I was the only one that served in Vietnam. They asked questions and I answered. Sometimes, one of two things happened. I got angry or started to cry. Or both. I tried to hide the rage and tears and remembered a time I couldn't.

A night in early 1971, alone and drunk, my anger grew and I didn't try to hide it. Nothing in particular, just everything in general. School, money, traffic or dropping a dish towel on the floor. I stormed from the living room, through the kitchen and jerked the door knob to fling the door open. Lunging out the back door, I yelled obscenities. I screamed them, one after the other. As the rage diminished, the tears formed and began their trickle down my face. Closing the door, I staggered back to the couch and sat down. The tears became sobbing. Sleep followed.

Getting up the next morning, I worried about waking the neighbors and what they might think. But, I felt calm and in control. Things seemed back to normal. Normal, until Memorial Day weekend.

On Memorial Day Weekend, I went to visit Mike, a friend and classmate from high school. I entered Holy Cross Cemetery and parked close to where he was buried. I walked to his grave holding two beers, by their necks, in one hand. Standing, looking down, I read his full name, his state - Washington, rank, the unit he was with when he was killed, the war in which he was killed - Vietnam, PH for Purple Heart and his date of birth and death. He never celebrated his 19th birthday. Sitting on the grass, next to his

grave marker, I took out my church key and opened the beers. Placing one on his stone, I started to drink the other and remember him. The tears started and then the sobbing. I heard the thunder of a squall approaching and then the downpour began. As I sobbed, it felt like God cried with me. After the storm passed, I left my empty bottle next to the full one I brought for Mike and left the cemetery.

Over the years, I visited Mike many times. Almost five decades have passed and some things are different. I no longer rage about the war or try to hide my tears. Some things may trigger the tears, be it the news, wars, suffering, a death, a picture or writing this story. What stays the same? There are moments I still feel the pain, cry in sorrow and will talk to you if you want to listen.