

## Autobiography of Clifford J. Reeder\*\*

I grew up in the small town of Eureka in southeastern Kansas, where I finished the eighth grade and went to work in a country grocery store. My next job was working in construction, building additions on grain elevators. After starting high school in Salina, Kansas, World War II began, and I did not want to be drafted; so I quit school in 1942, joined the Marine Corps MAG 14 and served in the South Pacific. When I left the Marine Corps after four years I had attained the rank of Master Sergeant. I settled in Cincinnati, Ohio, where I married and accepted a position with Cincinnati Bell where I worked until I retired.

I have been carving wood ever since I was a child, having been inspired by looking at my grandfather's cane and wanting to make one like it. That was the beginning of my carving canes. In 2006 I first started making canes for disabled veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan, and I have made at least 30 of these. Most of the eagle head canes I have made have been for veterans in military hospitals in a number of states. In addition I have made 15 canes for veterans that I know personally.

The most recent cane that I have completed is for Marine Lance Cpl. Matthew Bradford, who was severely wounded in 2007 by an IED that left him blind and a double amputee. Bradford is the first double amputee to re-enlist in the Marines, and is now stationed at Camp Lejeune, N.C., where he works with fellow wounded veterans to bolster their morale.

I had the unique opportunity to travel with army veteran, Paul Wiley, to Camp Lejeune to meet Lance Cpl. Bradford. He says that he just wants to show the veterans he works with that no matter what injuries they have, they are still alive. He hopes to show other wounded men and women, who want to stay in the service but think they can't, that it is possible.

Another hobby of mine has been making small wooden crosses for the confirmation classes at my church since the early '70s. I also make copper crosses that are sent overseas to the troops. So far I have made about 16 dozen of these crosses. Some of the troops have responded to me with letters of appreciation. That inspires me to continue making and sending these.

I am active in the Cincinnati Carvers Guild and in the River Valley Carvers in Kentucky. I also meet weekly with a small group of carvers in my community, that we affectionately call, "The Splinter Group." Next year I will turn 90, and I want to keep on carving canes and making crosses as long as I am able.