

Watchfires began with Julius Caesar

"I have seen Him in the watchfires of a hundred circling camps..."

Although mentioned in the second verse of Julia Ward Howe's "Battle Hymn of the Republic," watchfires aren't part of common usage, and aren't in some dictionaries.

This 2,000 year-old tradition of lighting beacons to help missing soldiers find their way home can be traced to Julius Caesar, the Roman general who conquered Gaul (France) and the territories east of the Rhine River.

Believing that his first allegiance was to his soldiers, Caesar instructed his troops of occupation to light large fires at every Roman outpost between France and Rome to help wounded, captured or missing soldiers find their way home.

To aid the returning soldiers, a drum was beaten ten times per hour at every watchfire outpost, giving an audio beacon as well as the visual beacons of the fires.

Soldiers tending the fires tended and fed the returning wounded and helped them find their way home.

Throughout history, accounts of watchfires have been part of many wars, among them the Crusades, the Crimean War, the Franco-Prussian War and the American Revolution.

During George Washington's first term as provincial colonel of American troops in 1754 during the French and Indian War, he placed watchfires and drummers at 25-mile intervals after the surrender of Fort Necessity to the French.

Similar fires were lit in 1755 after troops commanded by Washington and General Edward Braddock were ambushed.

Watchfires became part of Washington's standing orders after his appointment as Commander-in-Chief in 1775. They were used until the 20th century.

The October 22 watchfires will serve as a reminder for those still missing from all 20th century wars, a plea to never again abandon missing or captured troops and a call for unity among veterans' organizations.

by Grace R. Dove

Watchfire

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the names of local POW's or MIA's every hour or beat a drum ten times an hour, as was done by Caesar's soldiers.

The fires may be whatever size is most workable, even a small one in half of a 55-gallon drum, coalition members said. The intent of the fire counts more than its size.

Coalition members are optimistic about realizing their goal of watchfires lit every ten miles for more than 1,000 miles of eastern rivers.

So far, the Susquehanna's north branch will be lit from Tunkhannock to Berwick, while the west branch will have fires at Muncy and Lock Haven and on the main stem at Harrisburg.

Additional fires will be lit on the Delaware, on an island south on Trenton. More are planned for the Hudson.

Area coalition members are Walter I. Galka, John Charney, J.R. Richards, Cal Tinsley, Jim Charles, Chet Kunigonis, Jim Wachs, Greg Scholes, John Tasco, Pat Conway and Glen Lippincott.

While watchfires have been held in the eastern part of the country for the past seven years, usually around Memorial Day, a larger effort has never been attempted.

Area veterans' organizations worked together this past Memorial Day weekend to hold the Back Mountain's first watchfire to honor all POW/MIA's of all wars and all veterans and to properly dispose of worn and unusable American flags.

While unusable flags won't be disposed of at the October 22 watchfires, the intent remains: to light a physical and spiritual beacon honoring the missing and captured.

"We want people to remember the 2,100 missing guys in Vietnam and all of our country's missing soldiers," Tinsley said. "We want people to know that this must never happen again. If I were missing, I wouldn't want to be forgotten. I would want people to remember me."

"Our watchfires may not bring anyone home, as they have done in the past, but they'll serve as beacons to let the POW's and MIA's know that wherever they are, we have not forgotten them," Tasco said. "In three years I'd like to see the entire coast of Vietnam lit with watchfires."

Persons or organizations interested in helping in any way with the October 22 watchfires may write to the National Watchfire Coalition at P.O. Box 621, Dallas, PA, 18612-0621.

Taxpayer group branches out

By GRACE R. DOVE
Post Staff

Over the past four years the Dallas Taxpayers' Association has grown from a hastily-formed but vocal protest group to a dedicated watchdog organization with a county-wide focus and a mailing list of 500 persons.

In 1990, approximately 200 people turned out for the first meetings, protesting what they saw as three municipalities taking over residential garbage hauling from small area private contractors.

Four years later, nearly 500 turn out for meetings at the Idetown Fire Hall, the group's president said.

"Every dollar that the municipal, county, state and federal governments spend is your money," said president Russ Ockenhouse. "We're not against progress. We're for it, but only when it is done in a logical fashion."

Elected in 1993, he has kept abreast of issues and political developments by doing research, writing letters to the editors of area newspapers and attending county commissioners' meetings.

Ockenhouse said he is trying to do what he can, what he believes is right.

"We have to look out for the little guy," said secretary Beverly Smith. "You work hard every day, just trying to make ends meet and are getting walked on. We think that our elected officials should solicit people's opinions more. People should know more about meetings - when they are and what goes on."

Recently the organization wrote to the Luzerne County commissioners that it opposes county support of several projects, among them a regional railroad line, Congressman Paul Kanjorski's Earth Conservancy and the proposed inflatable dam on the Susquehanna River at Wilkes-Barre.

CMC appoints Gionfriddo

Shavertown resident Paul S. Gionfriddo, has been appointed employment manager at Community Medical Center Healthcare System.

Gionfriddo's responsibilities will include auditing and reviewing the CMCHS recruitment and selection practices; developing a position specific structured interview process; developing a CMCHS biographical data base; assisting in the refinement of the position control system; designing and implementing a formalized recruitment plan for CMCHS; and reassessing the CMCHS exit interview program.

He resides in Shavertown with his wife and three children.

"You work hard every day, just trying to make ends meet and are getting walked on."

Beverly Smith
Dallas Taxpayers' Ass'n. secretary

The group is concerned that these projects will end up like the financially-shaky Kirby Center for the Performing Arts, the Lackawanna County Stadium, the Montage Ski Resort and the Luzerne County Transportation Authority.

"We feel that they will most probably become taxpayer-funded, financially strapped...dumping grounds for do-nothing political jobs for...friends and relatives," they wrote, referring to Kanjorski's appointment of his brother to run the Earth Conservancy.

The organization also opposes construction of a Luzerne County arena, which it believes should be decided by the voters in a referendum.

"Put the arena on the ballot and let the people decide if they want it," Ockenhouse said. "As it stands now, only a few, mostly the investors, will benefit from it."

The association doesn't feel that Luzerne County can afford to become involved with "grandiose schemes" like the arena and an inflatable dam when some of its residents lack even the most basic needs - regular meals and a place to live.

"Our area is shamefully behind

in the building and repair of roads and bridges, the lowering or equitable distribution of property taxes and in the care and special consideration that we should be giving to senior citizens, children and the less fortunate who sleep in our streets or don't have a meal to eat," Ockenhouse wrote in a letter that also was published in the *Citizens' Voice*.

Favoring some type of tax reform, the association would like to further study county-wide reassessment as a remedy before supporting it.

While reassessment could lower some people's tax bills, Ockenhouse believes that many others' would increase because people have remodeled their homes or neighbors have built very expensive homes next door.

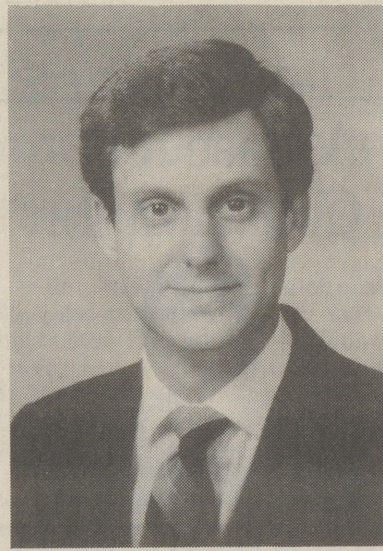
"We want to know exactly what will be taxed and what won't," he said. "It should be fair. You should pay just what your house and property are worth."

County support of a regional railroad system isn't a good idea either, especially when the bus company is on shaky financial ground, the group believes.

The government's main priorities should be creation of a good supply of well-paying, permanent jobs and improvement of streets and transportation, the association wrote.

"Arenas and other projects can come after people have the money to spend on entertainment and good roads to travel on."

"I fought in World War II," Ockenhouse said. "We won the war but lost the battle - we're supporting the economies of the countries that we beat instead of our own."



BART SLOCUM

Slocum cited by his peers

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Slocum is co-owner and vice president of Slocum Insurance Agency in Dallas.

He resides with his wife Laura and two children, Drew and Alex, in Shavertown.

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