

# Two Centralians Recall Tragedy Of 1919 Armistice Day

Following is an account of the infamous "Centralia Massacre" as seen through the eyes of two men who were there.

By JIM SCOGGINS  
Chronicle Staff Writer

Tuesday marks the 50th anniversary of the most widely known and blackest day in Centralia's history, the "Centralia Massacre" at the first Armistice Day parade on Tuesday, Nov. 11, 1919.

A great deal has been written on the incident, which started with members of the International Workers of the World labor union shooting into a column of ex-servicemen marching in the parade.

## Years Of Tension

The incident culminated years of tension between the I. W. W. (its members were commonly known as Wobblies) and other residents of the city of Centralia.

The different accounts of the tragedy vary widely in their "facts."

It is not the purpose of this article to tell the entire story or explore the reasons for the incident. That will be covered in a story in Tuesday's Daily Chronicle.

But two men who were part of the event and the days that followed still live in Centralia, and they were asked to recount what they remember.

## Watt Was Wounded

John Earl Watt was wounded while running for cover during the shooting. He later served as one of the main witnesses at the trial of some of the Wobblies in Montesano. He retired about 13 years ago after working for the Centralia post office.

Lloyd Dysart, a Centralia attorney, was not in Centralia at the time of the shooting but he returned that night and played a large part in the eventful days that followed.

Watt's day began at a shingle mill on the banks of the Skookumchuck River, where he worked and lived in company-provided quarters.

He had returned to Centralia early in August after discharge from the Army. Although not a member of the American Legion, he had been invited, along with a number of other ex-servicemen, to march with the Legion unit.

## Aware Of Tensions

Living at the mill a few miles from Centralia and going into town occasionally on weekends he was aware of the tensions in town only from what he had heard.

He was a member of the I.W. W. and carried the union's "red card."

"We had to hold a union card to work in several places. I had joined the union before I went into the Army, when I was working in the woods. Probably 50 of the servicemen marching in the parade were carrying 'red cards.'"

He ate lunch early, put on his uniform and went into town for the parade.

He estimates there were practically three blocks of veterans marching four-abreast, and he was considerably back in the ranks, probably in the third block.

He was marching next to Arthur McElfresh.

The parade started at Main Street and proceeded north on Tower Avenue to Third Street, where it was to turn around and march back to Main Street.

The front of the column of veterans had turned and gotten back down to Second Street when the commander, Warren O. Grimm, called for the column to halt to allow stragglers to close up.

Watt was still facing north,



JOHN EARL WATT

with the Arnold Hotel to his right and ahead of him. To his right rear and across Second Street was the Avalon House.

On the other (west) side of Tower Avenue, just behind where the front of the column had stopped at the Second Avenue intersection, was the I. W. W. Hall, with the Roderick Hotel the next building toward Second Avenue and a grocery store on the corner at that intersection.

Suddenly, shots began spraying from the Arnold and, he discovered later, from the Avalon and from Seminary Hill, one-quarter mile to the east.

One of the first shots killed Grimm.

The veterans began to scatter and dive for cover. Watt and McElfresh ran across the street

toward the Roderick, away from the source of gunfire.

Watt did not see McElfresh again. He was later found dead, shot through the head. Watt ran toward the Roderick, a building he knew because he had once lived there.

He ran by the front of the I. W. W. Hall, but as he reached the Roderick, the front window came crashing out, so he ran on past the grocery store to the Second Avenue intersection.

Shots were coming from the Roderick and the I. W. W. Hall before he reached the end of the block.

He remembered a doorway opening onto a stairway near the rear of the grocery store. Already almost across the street, he ran down the middle

of the street toward the doorway.

He saw a man come out of the alleyway behind the store, but he didn't worry about him because he was in uniform, too. Watt ran on toward the doorway.

"Just as I reached the curb, that's when I got it," Sharp Pain In Back

He felt a sharp pain in his back and thought he had been shot from behind. He fell back into the street, and that was the last he remembers of that Armistice Day.

"I was lying on my back and not seeing anything. I didn't know who shot me until it came out at the trial."

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LLOYD B. DYSART

from the city jail by a mob and hanged from a bridge over the Chehalis River.

Lloyd Dysart had gotten out of the service about the same time as Watt, but he had a few months left to complete his law degree. He had gone back to the University of Washington to finish that work.

He was in Seattle, in his fraternity house, on that fateful day. Bill Grimm, the brother of Warren O. Grimm, was a member of the same fraternity.

About 2 p.m., the phone rang. It was Grimm's father, calling to tell Bill that his brother had been killed and that he should come home.

Bill was on the Husky football team and was at the stadium at the time. Dysart told his father that he would get Bill and bring him home.

He found a friend with one of the few cars around. They found Grimm and left for Centralia over the virtually nonexistent road, arriving at the edge of town about 9:30 or 10 p.m., where they ran into a traffic jam.

"Cars were jammed up, coming in from all over the country. There were eight or ten cars there, just bristling with guns."

## Car Was Stopped

"They stopped us, looking for Wobblies. When they found out who we were, they told us to go ahead, but they said we should put on our uniforms and get a gun."

The friend left Grimm at his house, then took Dysart home and left town immediately to head back for Seattle.

"I put on my uniform and strapped on a .45, then went to the Elks where a meeting was going on."

Wesley Everest had already been hanged, by persons unknown, and some men were clamoring to "go get some more."

The Elks hall was upstairs in what is now the Gesler-McNiven building.

"When I got there, my father was on a chair trying to quiet the group. Most of the men were in uniform, and everybody was saying 'get a gun.' They were saying that Wobblies were coming in from everywhere."

While that proved untrue, the people still found many "Wobblies."

Although National Guard troops arrived in Centralia that night, much of the "law enforcement" remained in the hands of informal posses, who were arresting and bringing in dozens of "Wobblies."

Dysart and his father, George Dysart, an attorney, "spent more time getting innocent people out of jail than anything else."

"A Wobbly was anybody somebody didn't like."

Dysart did go along with some of the posses, and led some of them. He led the posse that arrested Eugene Barnett, one of the Wobblies that was found guilty at the Montesano trial.

"We set up a headquarters and gave instructions that any posse should check through it before going out."

Not all of the posses bothered, however, and one uncoordinated foray accounted for a tragedy that probably served more than anything else to start to bring the people of Centralia back to their senses.

An unauthorized posse came into the headquarters, after going to a cabin northeast of Centralia where they had heard some Wobblies were holed up. They had run into another group of men in the foggy woods and shooting had started.

"We found some Wobblies in the woods," they said, "and we got one of them." They had come back to get more men to go out again.

"Then another posse, a small group from Tenino, came in and said, 'We ran into some Wobblies in the woods, and they got one of us.'"

"Then they realized what had happened, and that started to sober them up."

One of the Tenino group, a game warden named Haney from Tenino, had been shot and killed in the unknown encounter of the two posses in the woods.

Dysart stayed in Centralia about a week, then returned to school. Although some histories have connected him with the prosecution at Montesano, he said he had no connection whatsoever, and never even went to the trial.

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## Agnew Blasts Critics

By BOB MONROE

Associated Press Writer

Vice President Spiro T. Agnew described Vietnam protest demonstrations today as a pointless "carnival in the streets" which proves nothing.

Agnew spoke out as both critics and backers of President Nixon's policy began a week of demonstrations in the controversy over America's Vietnam war involvement.

Groups backing the President highlight their activities with Veterans Day ceremonies in Washington Tuesday. Critics plan a massive march and anti-war rally in Washington Saturday.

Agnew said, "The mob, the mobilization, the moratorium have become somewhat fashionable forms of citizen expression. They are negative in content, disruptive in effect. They inflame emotions rather than stimulate solutions."

Agnew called for recognition of "a silent young majority who go to school, and to work, and to war if necessary."

He said they have been "overshadowed by the strident minority who arrogate unto themselves voice, virtue and power out of proportion to their numbers, and even more out of proportion to their abilities."

While a Republican and a Democratic senator became the first to announce they will participate in Saturday's mass rally to protest the war, Agnew urged Americans to "raise our voices in spirited defense of the most successful society the world has yet known."

## Elk Teams Place High

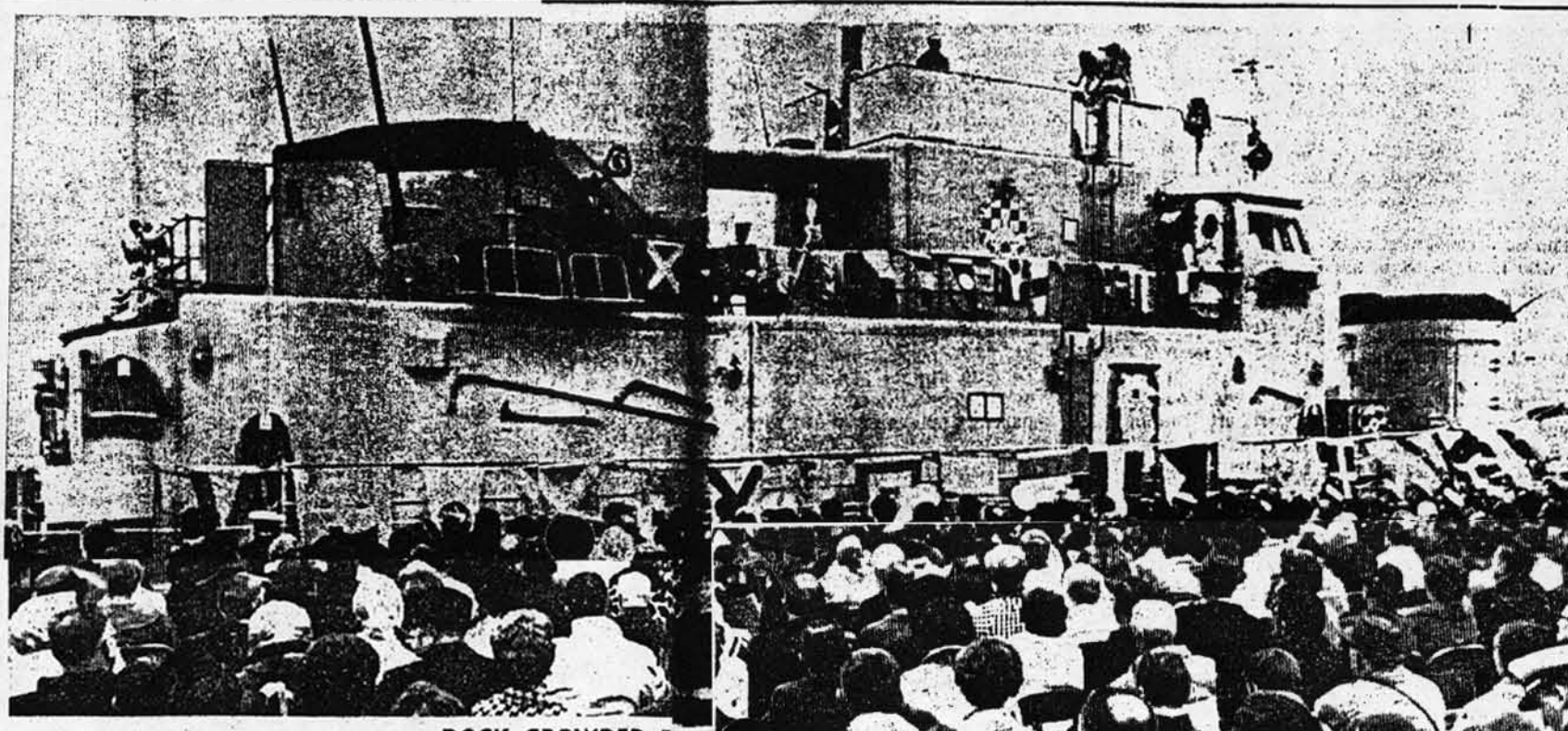
Centralia and Chehalis Elks teams finished one-two in district ritual competition in Bremerton over the weekend, both groups thus earning the right to compete in the state contest in January in Port Angeles.

The first-place Centralia team dominated the list of all-district officers, placing four, while Chehalis had two members on the list of outstanding performers.

Centralians winning individual honors were Leading Knight Fred Oakes Jr., Loyal Knight Larry Christomos, Lecturing Knight Walt Wolden and Inner Guard Ron Moore.

Chaplain Joe Staeger and Esquire Dale Calkins were top individuals for the Chehalis team.

Other Centralia team members are Exalted Ruler Ed Wheeler, Esquire Roy Moore, Chaplain Richard Wells and Candidate Steve...



DOCK CROWDED FOR

Chehalians crowded the Old Town Dock Saturday afternoon in watch commissioning ceremonies of the USS Chehalis, a new breed of gunboat. The speed, firepower and maneuverability of the USS Chehalis

ma to the patrol gunboat a potent weapon in the arsenal of the United States Navy. In photo above, Wayne McDaniels, Chehalis, commissioning speaker, stands on ship's deck with crowd on dock in foreground. — Chronicle Staff Photos

## USS Chehalis Joins Navy's Fleet



Lt. Paul D. Frazer, commander of the new USS Chehalis, cuts the commissioning cake Saturday afternoon at Tacoma for guests at a reception following commissioning ceremonies. Mrs. Frazer assisted. The ship's name, commissioning date and motto, "More Than Our Share," are listed on the cake.

## Veterans Day Activities Planned; Closures Told

Veterans Day ceremonies in Centralia Tuesday will commemorate the 50th anniversary of the holiday, highlighted by a memorial service in the morning and a parade in the afternoon.

Most public activities in the Lewis County area, including schools, and Centralia College, will be closed in

while other schools in the area will be closed Tuesday only.

The memorial service will begin at 10:30 a.m. in Centralia's George Washington City Park and will feature the traditional wreath-laying ceremony.

GEORGE BLOMDAHL  
Chronicle Staff Writer

MA (Special) — Patrol 44, the United States Chehalis, was commissioned Saturday afternoon at Tacoma with a crowd of 200 Chehalis and Centralians at the Old Town Dock.

24-man crew manned the national ensign, and commissioning were hoisted and the ship into commission Paul D. Frazer, commander, assuming command of the ship.

150 Take Cruises

Following the commissioning ceremony, three cruises were given with 150 of the guests getting rides on the \$4 million gunboat.

A reception was held at the Top of the Ocean Restaurant when Mrs. Oscar A. Mills, ship's sponsor, presented a silver service set from the City of Chehalis. Mrs. William Lawrence, Centralia, chairman

when the USS Chehalis was launched last year in Commencement Bay.

"We are awed by the magnitude of this event," McDaniels said. "We can't help but feel closer and more personally involved" in the nation's Vietnam efforts. "We will watch more closely the war and the development of peace which we all want."

McDaniels was introduced by Rear Adm. P. J. Hannifin, 13th Naval District commandant. Welcoming remarks were made by Arnold Strom Jr., president, Tacoma Boat-building Company, which built the ship. The invocation was given by the Rev. James F. Scott, Chehalis.

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of the Indian Affairs committee, Lewis County Historical Society, presented a copy of the only book written about the Chehalis Indians to Lt. Frazer.

The Twin Cities were officially represented by Chehalis Mayor Oscar A. Mills, Commissioner Willard Brown and Earl J. Ferguson, chamber of commerce president Woody Holland and chamber manager Paul McBride, and Centralia Mayor Don Naismith and chamber president Frank Garland.

## Off-Shore Patrol

The 165-foot USS Chehalis is designed for off-shore patrol and the control of coastal traffic and is reporting to the U.S. Pacific Fleet commander for duty off Vietnam. The ship is manned by four officers and 24 enlisted men.

She is armed with a 3-inch, 50 caliber gun, a 40 mm anti-aircraft gun and two twin 50 caliber machine guns. A gas turbine jet engine — the same used in the supersonic F-4 Phantom fighter-bomber — can propel the Chehalis in excess of 35 knots.

## Nixon Hale And Hearty, Physical Examiner Says

GTON (AP) — President Nixon underwent a two physical examination at Naval Hospital and himself as being in

just a routine physical fine result," he told as he left the hospital a Maryland.

He flew from the White House in a helicopter for the eight minute trip to the hospital in suburban Bethesda.

He was greeted by Capt. William C. Turville, the command-

shape, he replied, "yes, yes didn't do any damage."

Nixon entered the hospital at 8:08 a.m. and left about 10 a.m. It was Nixon's first complete physical since taking office.

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Three key Cabinet members — Secretary of State William P. Rogers, Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird and Atty. Gen. John N. Mitchell — spent the weekend at a hotel near Nixon's waterfront bungalow in Key Biscayne, Fla.

## Conferring Held

The White House had announced in advance they were on hand to confer with the chief executive on Vietnam and the