

Volume XV Number 3
December 2021 through March 2022
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Palmer Lake Historical Society

2021 Board of Directors

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Program & Events Information: December 2021 – March 2022

December 12, 2021, 1:00 PM – Annual Yule Log Hunt and Wassail Ceremony*

*Note: This is a Town of Palmer Lake event; there is no PLHS program in December.

January 20, 2022, 6:30 PM – Annual Members Meeting and Chili Supper

February 17, 2022, 7:00 PM - "Adventures on the Pikes Peak Cog Railway" – Mel McFarland

March 17, 2022, 7:00 PM - "The Night of a Thousand Heroes" – Tracy Beach

Did You Know?



POINSETTIAS, called the "flame flowers of the Holy Night" in their native Mexico, became the nation's Christmas flower in the 1920s when the Ecke family of southern California developed a potted hybrid.

A Newsletter of the Palmer Lake Historical Society and the *Lucretia Vaile Museum*

The WWII Story of Felix L. Sparks:

Dachau Liberator, Brigadier General (Ret), and Colorado Hero

Palmer Lake Historical Society programs have included presentations telling the stories of Jerry Cox Vasconcells, World War I flying ace from Denver, WW II Medal of Honor Recipient William J. "Bill" Crawford of Pueblo and Palmer Lake, and the men of the 10th Mountain Division and their heroism in Anzio during WW II, but have you ever heard the story of Army officer Felix Sparks? Not well known but inspirational, his story is being shown as a four-part series on Netflix based on Alex Kershaw's 2012 book, *The Liberator*.



Felix L. Sparks, Colorado's Unsung Hero

Felix Sparks was born in San Antonio, Texas, in 1917. The oldest of five children, he grew up in a small town in Arizona during the Great Depression. The family, like many across the nation, was struggling to make ends meet. His father saved up a grubstake for him and set Felix adrift, in his teens. In 1935, after unsuccessfully seeking work in the shipyards of Corpus Christi and San Francisco, Sparks did what many young men of his generation did in the 1930s – he enlisted in the United States Army. He trained at Fort Sill, Oklahoma.



In 1941 Sparks was appointed adjutant to Col. Charles M. Anckorn. His duties during WWII took him to Oran, a harbor in Algeria; he participated in Operation Husky-the victorious Allied invasion of Italy. In the Battle of Anzio, he was the only survivor in his unit. He saw action in southern France, in the Vosges mountains, and in the Battle of Aschaffenburg. But he is remembered for leading the men of the 3rd Battalion, 157th Infantry Regiment of the 45th Infantry's "Thunderbird" Division, hardened combat veterans, in liberating the Dachau Concentration Camp. The traumatic shock of finding over 2,000 bodies, men and women, and another 1,400 prisoners, still alive but many dying, was incomprehensible. "While we were accustomed to death, we were not able to comprehend the type of death we encountered at Dachau," Sparks remembered.

In September 1945 LTC Felix Sparks and his men from 3rd Battalion, 157th Infantry, Colorado Army National Guard, returned from World War II. They had seen 511 days of continuous combat, including four amphibious landings in Sicily, Salerno, Anzio and Southern France. After experiencing the human cost of war for nearly two years, they then witnessed the human cost of racial and ideological hatred at Dachau.

In a ten-year active-duty career, Sparks rose to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. After the war, he moved to Colorado, the state which so many of his men were from. His men, Sparks related to author Alex Kershaw, would always wax lyrical about how wonderful Colorado was, and he said, "What the hell? Why not go and try it out?"



Above: Collection of personal photos

Sparks earned a law degree in 1947 at the University of Colorado. "He took several months off in 1946 and 1947 and drove all around Colorado trying to get the National Guard back together in these mountain towns, and while doing that he visited widows of the men who'd served in his combat (unit)," Kershaw writes. "He deeply cared about, and was committed to, his men. During the war, and after."

He was subsequently elected District Attorney of Delta County, Colorado, but lost reelection. In 1952 he was appointed to fill an unexpired term as an Associate Justice on the Colorado Supreme Court. Former Colorado Gov. Dick Lamm, who was close to Sparks, was quoted as saying of his service on the Colorado Water conservation Board that Coloradans could never thank Sparks enough for helping protect Colorado water rights.

Sparks passed away in September 25, 2007, eight weeks after his 90th birthday.

President's Message



Season's Greetings!

Another year has almost come to an end. I hope it was a happy and healthy one!

We've been readying the museum for re-opening, hopefully by the first of 2022. The ramp to the library upstairs is nearing completion, so when it's finished, we'll be able to open again to the public. Watch for information on our website:

<https://palmerdividehistory.org>.

Since Christmas isn't far away, we have some nice gift items on our website; check out the store! You can order and pay for them with a credit card. You can also renew your membership online.

If you're shopping on Amazon, please take a moment and choose Palmer Lake Historical Society as the non-profit that you want to support. A small portion of your purchase will go to the Society, and, best of all, it doesn't cost you a thing!

On January 20 we will hold our membership meeting. It will be a bit different this year. We'll hold it in the Tri-Lakes Chamber of Commerce in Monument, and we will serve a chili supper instead of our traditional potluck.

Please consider serving on our Board of Directors. The President and Vice President positions are open, as well as several at-large positions. Or think about volunteering your time. We really need some fresh ideas!! Please contact me (the outgoing President) for more information.

I hope you all have a wonderful holiday season, and all the best in 2022.

Su Ketchmark, PLHS President



Chilly Night on the Palmer Lake Village Green the evening of February 20, 2020
Ron Oatney photo

Felix Sparks's Colorado National Guard, Then and Now

THEN:

Following World War II, Felix Sparks spent his adult life in Colorado, practicing law in Delta, Colorado, leading the Colorado Army National Guard as Adjutant General, serving an unexpired term as an Associate Justice of the Colorado Supreme Court, and for over 20 years serving as director of the Colorado Water Conservation Board.

He was in the Colorado Army National Guard during the 1962 Cuban Missile crisis, and between 1968 and 1979



he served as Adjutant General of the Colorado Army National Guard, stepping into an official role he'd been quietly pursuing since returning from the war. He ultimately rose to the rank of brigadier general.



LTC Felix Sparks
Commander, 3rd Bn, 157th Infantry
Ainich, Germany, May 1945
(Permission granted by Donna Klein on behalf of the Buechner estate)

On May 30, 2015, the final reunion of the 157th Infantry Regimental Association, including 1-157th Infantry Veterans from World War II and their families, was held.

"This is all part of building a legacy; it is all part of building a culture that will outlast any single person," said Lt. Col. Brey Hopkins, 1-157th Infantry Battalion commander.

In order to further connect with their history, the 1-157th Infantry contacted the 157th Regimental Association. During 2014-2015, they worked together to plan the final reunion for the Regimental Association, held in Denver, Colorado, May 30-31, 2015.

Nearly 70 years after they returned home, Rex Raney, 93, and Karl Mann, 90, (in photo right), both members of the 157th Infantry Regiment in WWII attended the festivities of the reunion. Several family members of other WWII veterans were also in attendance, including the family of Brig. Gen. Felix Sparks.



A memorial ceremony for Brig. Gen. Felix Sparks was held at Crown Hill Cemetery, Wheat Ridge, Colorado, as part of the final reunion of the 157th Infantry Regimental Association, including 1-157th Infantry Veterans from World War II and their families, hosted by members of the 1st Battalion 157th Infantry, Colorado Army National Guard, May 31, 2015

(U.S. Army National Guard photo by 1st Lt. Skye Robinson)

AND NOW:

Today, the Colorado National Guard (CO NG) Joint Force Headquarters (JFHQ) is located in the Sparks Armory in Centennial, Colorado. Honoring BG Felix Sparks' legacy, the building houses the extensive Sparks Armory Collection, consisting of World War II photos, papers and artifacts.

Sparks' Colorado National Guard service is also honored at the Colorado National Guard Readiness Center, located at the intersection of Voyager Parkway and Briargate Parkway in Colorado Springs.

In Spring of 2020, in response to the COVID-19 Pandemic, more than 630 Colorado National Guard citizen soldiers and airmen were activated – the largest and longest in state history. Guard members helped distribute the Pfizer and Moderna COVID-19 vaccines, but their biggest role has revolved around testing.



News Release: In January 2021, the Colorado National Guard 157th Division was activated for the first time since the end of WWII to serve for one year under Central Command, which includes the Middle East, Northeastern Africa and South Asia.

Seventy Colorado Army National Guard infantrymen from Company A, 1st Battalion, 157th Infantry Regiment departed Colorado Springs on January 29th.

The storied unit now composed of diverse and highly skilled Colorado National Guard volunteer soldiers, will join troops from the Vermont Army National Guard's 86th Infantry Brigade Combat Team in support of Operation Spartan Shield. Together, they'll support combatant commanders with infrastructure security forces.

The deployment is a first since World War II for one of the Colorado National Guard's oldest and most storied units. In 1945, Lt. Col. Felix Sparks led the regiment in liberating the Dachau concentration camp.

Upcoming PLHS Programs and Events December 2021 through March 2022

Social Hour at 6:30 PM, Presentations begin at 7:00 PM in the Palmer Lake Town Hall, 28 Valley Crescent Street

Sunday, December 12, 2021, 1:00 PM

Annual Palmer Lake Yule Log Hunt and Ceremony



Note: This is a Town of Palmer Lake event and will take place in the Palmer Lake Gazebo.

"The Winner-Finder of the log rides it back to the Town Hall along with other children. The Hider and the Finder then saw the log in half. Half will be burned in the Town Hall fireplace during the Wassail Ceremony, and the other half will be used for next year's kindling."

Rodger Voelker

From the November 10, 1946 issue of the Colorado Springs Gazette:

Grandparents, fathers, mothers, sons and daughters and all of the 350 residents of Palmer Lake this week begin preparations for an event which attract visitors from all over the United States to the community Sunday, Dec. 21. The Palmer Lake residents are resuming the annual Yule Log ceremony, discontinued since 1941 due to the stress of the war. They are hoping for double the 1,500 visitors that attended in 1941.

Thursday, January 20, 2022, 6:00 PM

SPECIAL EVENT

Annual Membership Meeting and Chili Supper

Don't miss this event! No need to bring a potluck item! The PLHS will provide the chili, cornbread, dessert, and drinks. Supper will be followed by a short business meeting and election of 2022 officers. Attendees will be encouraged to renew their 2022 PLHS memberships - or to join if they're not PLHS members.

The annual PLHS "history" calendar will be available. Renowned local artist Joe Bohler has again donated his artwork for the calendar's cover. Three paintings by Palmer Lake artist Jamie Wilke are also featured in this year's calendar.



Thursday, February 17, 2022

"Adventures on the Pikes Peak Cog Railway"

Presenter: Mel McFarland



Over the years of his working on the Cog, Mel experienced both humorous and serious moments. One of the questions he was often asked was: "What happens if the train runs away?" For the answer to this and many other questions, Mel invites you to join him as he tells the story of his "adventures on the Pikes Peak Cog Railway."

After retiring from public school teaching, Mel began a second career as an engineer and conductor on the Manitou & Pikes Peak Cog Railway until his "second" retirement in 2014. He continues his work as an artist, author, railroad historian and supporter of numerous railway historical societies.

Thursday, March 17, 2022

"The Night of a Thousand Heroes"

Presenter: Tracy Beach



Tracy Beach's program is based on her book "The Night of a Thousand Heroes" and will consist of a short historical lecture on the history of the disastrous June 1921 Pueblo Flood, a slide show, and a presentation of historical flood artifacts.

Tracy Beach, raised in Salida, CO, is the author of "The Tunnels under our feet- Colorado's forgotten hollow sidewalks;" "My life as a Whore-the biography of Madam Laura Evens;" "Frozen to the cabin floor-the biography of Baby Doe Tabor;" "Michael;" and "The Night of a Thousand Heroes." Currently underway are two WW2 biographies.

The Annual Palmer Lake Chili Supper and Star Lighting was held on Saturday, November 27, 2021.

To our members, supporters, and friends -

At this time of year, we are particularly grateful to all who have helped make 2021 a successful year despite the uncertainties caused by the COVID-19 Pandemic.

*May the Blessings of the Christmas Season
be with you all throughout the Coming Year.*



April 29, 2020 Resolution Honors the 75th Anniversary of the Dachau Concentration Camp Liberation, Led by Lt. Col. Felix Sparks

Washington, D.C. – On April 29, 2020, U.S. Senators Cory Gardner (R-CO) and Michael Bennet (D-CO) applauded the unanimous Senate passage of their bipartisan resolution commemorating the 75th anniversary of the liberation of the Dachau concentration camp, led by Lieutenant Colonel Felix Sparks and the 45th Infantry “Thunderbird” Division, composed of National Guard units from Colorado, Oklahoma, Arizona, and New Mexico, of the Seventh Army of the United States. Following World War II, Felix Sparks spent his adult life in Colorado, serving in the Colorado National Guard and as an Associate Justice of the Colorado Supreme Court.

Lt. Col. Felix Sparks’ Remarks given on May 8, 1995, at the U.S. Holocaust Museum, opened on April 22, 1993

Lt. Col. Felix Sparks saw unspeakable evil up close on April 29th, 1945, when he and members of the 45th Infantry Division brought liberation to the Dachau concentration camp. Established in March 1933, it operated continuously until the end of World War II in 1945. The following remarks given on May 8, 1995, at the U.S. Holocaust Museum, describe the indescribable:



On the morning of April 29th, 1945, I was a lieutenant colonel commanding an infantry battalion of the United States 45th Infantry Division, with the mission of breaching the defenses of the city of Munich, Germany, in my assigned combat sector. Shortly after I had launched an attack against the outer defenses of Munich, I received an order to immediately proceed to the Dachau Concentration Camp. I knew nothing about the camp, nor had I ever heard of it.



Our first experience with the camp came as a traumatic shock. The first evidence of the horrors to come was a string of forty railway cars on a railway spur leading into the camp. Each car was filled with emaciated human corpses, both men and women. A hasty search by the stunned infantry soldiers revealed no signs of life among the hundreds of still bodies, over 2,000 in all.

It was in this atmosphere of human depravity, degradation and death that the soldiers of my battalion then entered the camp itself. Almost all of the SS command guarding the camp had fled before our arrival, leaving behind about two hundred lower ranking members of the command. There was some sporadic firing of weapons. As we approached the confinement area, the scene numbed my senses. Dante’s Inferno seemed pale compared to the real hell of Dachau.

A row of small cement structures near the prison entrance contained a coal-fired crematorium, a gas chamber, and rooms piled high with naked and emaciated corpses. As I turned to look over the prison yard with un-believing eyes, I saw a large number of dead inmates lying where they had fallen in the last few hours or days before our arrival. Since all of the bodies were in various stages of decomposition, the stench of death was overpowering.

The men of the 45th Infantry Division were hardened combat veterans. We had been in combat almost two years at that point. While we were accustomed to death, we were not able to comprehend the type of death that we encountered at Dachau.

Many of the prisoners were still alive, but many were dying as we arrived and continued to die at the rate of over a hundred a day for about two weeks after our arrival. There were over six hundred troops from the 45th Infantry Division who were in Dachau on the day of liberation, along with some troops from the 42nd Infantry Division. During the month of April 1945, several hundred other slave labor and death camps were liberated by American, British and Russian soldiers.

History - should be more than a memory!

Like us on Facebook

Visit the PLHS website by scanning our QR code with your smart phone.



Palmer Lake Historical Society publishes this newsletter at
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Layout and Editing: Sigi Walker

Note: All submissions may be edited for content, grammar, and space allocations, and become the property of the Palmer Lake Historical Society unless other arrangements have been made. Digital word submissions in .doc or .docx, photos in .jpg format, please. Submit pieces and photos to Editor at mikensigi@comcast.net

**Lucretia Vaile
Museum Hours:**
**Currently closed pending
completion of a handicap
accessible entry**
**Tours: Call 559-0837 and
leave a message**

**Contributing to
this issue:**
Su Ketchmark Wayne Russert
Eric Veed Mike & Sigi Walker
Thanks to all who reviewed and
commented!

Palmer Lake Historical Society Membership/Renewal Form

Annual membership in the Palmer Lake Historical Society is available in the following categories:

<input type="checkbox"/> Individual	\$ 20.00
<input type="checkbox"/> Family	\$ 30.00
<input type="checkbox"/> Student	\$ 10.00
<input type="checkbox"/> Supporting	\$ 35.00
<input type="checkbox"/> Benefactor	\$ 50.00
<input type="checkbox"/> Curator	\$ 75.00

YES, I would like to support the PLHS. My payment of \$ _____ is enclosed. ___ New ___ Renewing

Method of payment:
Cash \$ _____
Check No. _____

Name as you wish it to appear in our membership files (please PRINT):
Name _____
Mailing address _____

City _____ State _____
Zip _____
Contact Phone _____
E-mail _____
Signature _____
Date _____

Please return this completed form with your payment to:
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Palmer Lake CO 80133-0662