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Great nephew shares insight: Honored deputy was tough;



Coach C. Doyle McCall (above) shares insight about Levy County history and his great uncle - Deputy Atticus Haygood Ellzey (1881-1945).

Photo from FHSAA Archives

**By Jeff M. Hardison © Jan. 29, 2018
at 11:57 a.m.**

CHIEFLAND – A conversation Sunday (Jan. 28) added to the story of a Levy County deputy who was killed in the line of duty in 1945 and who was honored in 2018.

Just as most folks called Atticus Haygood Ellzey “Haygood,” most folks called one of his brothers William Wofford Ellzey, “Wofford.”

Atticus Haygood Ellzey (April 16, 1881-Jan. 28, 1945) was honored with a memorial ceremony out next to U.S. Highway 19 next to the northbound lane a bit south of the intersection of State Road 24 in the Town of Otter Creek on Thursday

(Jan. 25), a few days prior to the anniversary of his assassination by a couple of ne'er-do-wells.

On Sunday (Jan. 28), speaking with HardisonInk.com publisher Jeff M. Hardison, C. Doyle McCall, 89, shared some insight he had from back in 1945 and before.

Hardison and McCall had some moments to socialize before the arrival at First United Methodist Church of Chiefland of Bobby McCallum, who has become the Sunday School teacher in place of Coach McCall, as the older gentleman is dealing with a health issue.

Sheriff McCallum is the Sunday school teacher in that class now.

Coach McCall, a retired coach, educator and administrator from the Levy County Public School System, was an older teenager back then, having been born in late 1928 in the community of Levy County known as Gulf Hammock.

The Florida High School Athletic Association lists information about Coach McCall on its website.

“McCall's record for 25 years as head football coach was 162-78-16,” the FHSAA notes. “Chiefland's undefeated 1961 team was declared state Class C champions by state sports writers. His track team won the state track championship in 1965, garnering him the honor of Florida Athletic Coaches Association Track Coach of the Year.”

Before his days as a coach, teacher and principal in Chiefland, he was a youngster and student in Gulf Hammock, the Town of Otter Creek and Bronson.

“I was born in Gulf Hammock,” McCall has said. “My momma said I was the first

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child born in Gulf Hammock, because before that it was known as 'Gun Town.'"

McCall is the son of Frank and Lillian McCall.

Coach McCall is best known as "Coach." The football field at Chiefland High School is named in his honor, as is a relatively new pavilion at First United Methodist Church of Chiefland.

Atticus Haygood Ellzey was the son of Mary Averilla White (1845-1898) and Robert Martin Ellzey (1831-1909), according to ancestry records on the Internet.

Haygood's siblings included Robert Martin Ellzey, William Wofford Ellzey and Avarilla Ellzey Meeks, according to ancestry records on the Internet.

Atticus Haygood Ellzey married Mary Etta Jones and had two children. Later, Atticus Haygood Ellzey married Izetta Berryhill and had 13 children, according to ancestry records on the Internet.

"I was in high school at the time when Uncle Haygood was shot," McCall said.

Coach McCall shared some information about life in the Town of Otter Creek back then.

For instance, there were only two telephones in the Town of Otter Creek in January of 1945, he said.

From Coach McCall's perspective, "Uncle Haygood" was really his great uncle because Haygood Ellzey was the brother of McCall's grandfather Wofford Ellzey.

William Wofford Ellzey told his grandson C. Doyle McCall that "Uncle Haygood" (Levy County Deputy Atticus Haygood Ellzey) had gone into a "juke joint" in the Town of Otter Creek, where two white men were starting a ruckus with the black patrons there.

Later during the night of Jan. 28, 1945, those two men "hid in a palmetto patch and then popped up and shot him right there."

Back then, Coach McCall said, there was one sheriff and two deputies to cover the whole county. One deputy was in Williston, he said, and the other was in the Town of Otter Creek. The death of his great uncle was not immediately known as it would have been today.

Those two killers spent the rest of their lives in the Florida Prison System. They used an ambush and firearm to kill the only deputy who died in the line of duty in Levy County.

"Uncle Haygood" was not a man to be trifled with.

"Uncle Haygood was one tough character," Coach McCall said. "Granddaddy (Wofford Ellzey, Haygood's brother) said Uncle Haygood would be fighting every day in school. One thing's for sure, you never would dare Uncle Haygood to do something."

There was one young man that Uncle Haygood would always fight, coach's grandfather told him. They would both be riding their horse on the road between Rocky Hammock and Otter Creek, McCall said. They would end up facing each other as they were heading toward opposite destinations.

Both men would dismount and then just start fighting each other, McCall said.

Even Haygood Ellzey's brother should have known not to tempt fate.

"Granddaddy was missing the finger off one of his hands," Coach McCall said. "He told me that he and Uncle Haygood were out chopping firewood. Uncle Haygood told granddaddy to put his hand on a stump. He did, and Uncle Haygood cut off his finger."

McCall said his Uncle Haygood was one of the best shots he ever knew. Haygood Ellzey could shoot a bird out of the air with his pistol, he said.

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Back then, Coach McCall said, the two Levy County deputies did not have uniforms or marked patrol vehicles.

To put law enforcement in Levy County in perspective back then in January of 1945, it was almost 20 years before the “Miranda rights” were defined by the United States Supreme Court in 1966.

“Uncle Haygood would carry a blackjack up his sleeve,” McCall said. “He would move his arm quick and it would be in his hand. He would knock ‘em out and then tell them they were under arrest.

“Chiefland was bad in those days,” McCall said. “He would go to Chiefland on Saturday nights and knock ‘em out and stack ‘em like stove wood in the back of his car and take them to jail in Bronson.”

Coach McCall said Levy County Sheriff W.B. Whiddon (who was sheriff from 1929 to 1944) would tell Deputy Haygood Ellzey to go to Cedar Key, and the coach’s great uncle would clean up that town just like Chiefland. The process was to knock out the suspect, tell him he was under arrest and then transport a bunch of them stacked up in his personal vehicle to the jail in Bronson.

The next two Levy County sheriffs after Sheriff Whiddon were Levy County Sheriff J.W. Turner Jr. (1944-1945) and then Levy County Sheriff George T. Robbins (1945-1955), according to historical records at the Levy County Sheriff’s Office.

“Uncle Haygood was one tough character,” Coach McCall said, adding as he indicated with his fingers showing about a half-inch of space in the air “And he was about that much better than those he arrested.”

Some verbal sharing of rural history on Sunday morning (Jan. 28, 2018) might help people understand that nothing is so constant as change.

Life was rough and tumble in Levy County more than 70 years ago (on that fateful night of Jan. 28, 1945); however, there was a law enforcement officer back then who would stand up for other people who needed a little bit of help.

And there were people back then, too, who ambushed and killed that honorable (and tough) man.