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in fatal crash/10
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Local News

METRO EDITION
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and Windham, N.H.

THE SUN, LOWELL, MASSACHUSETTS

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Homage to our local heroes

Across region,
local veterans
are honored
on 'their day'

By DAVID PERRY
Sun Staff

They could have been casual. It was their day. Instead, they slipped into uniforms of gray-blue and olive green, if they still fit. Or uniforms that identified them with a particular veteran's group, or war. Then the hats. Once baby-faced Marines and soldiers, most of them are old, gray and wrinkled now. Old men in funny hats. Yesterday, Veterans Day, was their day. They thought about buddies lost. They headed down to meet their brethren, swapping stories with the only other people who really understand. They watched flags hoisted, wreaths laid before monuments of fine stone, guns fired into the crisp air of a fall morning, a chorus of "Taps." It happened all over the area yesterday morning. Their day. Here's just a small glimpse of many local tributes:



Marine Wayne Lannon, commander of Dracut American Legion Post 9307, stands proudly during yesterday's ceremony. SUN/MICHAEL PIGEON



Dracut color guard member Ray LeClair of Pelham, N.H., holds Old Glory for all to see, and salute at Dracut's event. SUN/MICHAEL PIGEON

Over breakfast, state Sen. Steven Panagiotakos was speaking to about 200 of them at the Polish American Veteran's Club in Lowell.

"What do we owe them? Only everything we have."

At 8 a.m. at Veterans Memorial Park in Dracut, Boy Scouts from Troop 80 carried the colors, and Dracut High School buglers Scott Cushman and Lynsey Meanulty stood ready to play "Taps" to about 100 people gathered. Veterans lined up along a sidewalk. Officials dedicated a wreath, four men with guns fired three volleys.

Speakers included Nicholas Pappas, a retired Air Force colonel, state Rep. Colleen Garry, and Robert Page, senior vice commander of the Lowell Veterans Council.

"This is your day, my day, our day," said Page. "It was given to us by a grateful nation."

"When people think of Veterans Day, they think of old men in funny hats," Page said. "That suits me fine. I'm proud of it."

Garry spoke of how proud she was her nieces actually knew what Veterans Day is about, beyond being a day off from school.

An hour later in Lowell, at



Cy Mancuso of Chelmsford, left, salutes along with a long line of veterans during the playing of the national anthem at the Polish American Veterans Club in Lowell yesterday, where the Lowell Veterans Council held a breakfast and ceremony in observance of Veterans Day. SUN/JAMIE LYN GIAMBRONE

the PAV club, Robert Casper, commander of the Lowell Veterans Council, set the table for the sort of pride that ran through ceremonies happening across the region.

"We don't live in America," he said. "America lives in us."

Every year on the 11th hour of the 11th day, Tyngsboro resident Ray Herbert, who served in the Navy during World War II, Korea and Vietnam, sees fewer and fewer of his comrades in uniform.

Please see HONORED/10



Scout leader Betsy Matthews of Tyngsboro admires her town's World War II Memorial with her Cub Scout sons, Rory, 8, left, and Tynan, 6 1/2, center, at the town's rededication ceremony yesterday. SUN/JAMIE LYN GIAMBRONE



From left, Bill Ducharme, son of Paul, Dennis Ducharme, son of George, and Raymond Ducharme, son of Ray, admire a plaque dedicated at the corner of Locke and Westford streets in Chelmsford yesterday to their fathers and their uncle Teddy, all of whom served in World War II. SUN/MICHAEL PIGEON



From left, Charleyne Stumpf, president of the Ladies Auxiliary Post 3291, Susan Boklaga, the auxiliary's chaplain, and member Joe Moore listen as Pepperell VFW Post Chaplain Raymond Hurley leads a prayer at the Vietnam Monument yesterday in Pepperell. SUN/MICHAEL PIGEON

LOCAL NEWS

Across region, local veterans are honored on 'their day'

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"They're just not showing up like they used to," Herbert said. "We just don't have the people we used to have." But this year's ceremony in Tyngsboro was populated by more than a dozen area veterans, including seven from World War II, now well-creased and into their 70s and 80s, as well as several from the Korean War and from Vietnam. Flanked by their families, town and state officials, members of the Tyngsboro High marching band and Cub Scout Pack 46, the crowd of about 80 listened to music, bowed their heads in prayer, and placed hands over their hearts. This year was a special one, some said, what with a contentious presidential election and an overseas war raging on, and many expressed their hope for democracy in Iraq and Afghanistan and offered prayers for American soldiers' safe return.

In the patch of grass at Tyngsboro's veterans' monument, where routes 3A and 113 converge, the memories were still fresh for Fred Choate and Fred Landry, both of whom served in World War II.

Landry, stationed aboard an aircraft carrier in the Pacific in 1945, treaded water for nearly 5 hours after his ship, the *S.S. Sangamon*, was attacked from the air. He was finally rescued just off the coast of Okinawa, Japan, in what was to be one of the final battles of the Great War.

For his part, Choate, an infantry instructor, remembered receipt of three letters that, had they not been recalled, would likely have sent him directly to the frontlines, and possibly hurtling him toward a very different future. Choate said many of the names of soldiers engraved on the Tyngsboro monument were familiar ones, and said the lessons of service were ones he'd carried throughout his life.

"You take care of your buddies, and they take care of you," he said, wringing his hands. "You're all one."

In Chelmsford, a crowd gathered at the intersection of Westford Street and Locke Road, near the home where Ray, Paul, George, and Teddy Ducharme grew up with their six other siblings.

Officials unveiled a white sign bearing the Chelmsford seal that read: "Dedicated to the four Ducharme brothers of Chelmsford who bravely served our country during World War II."

A later generation of Ducharmes — Ray (son of Ray), Billy (son of Paul), and Dennis (son of George) — laid down a wreath festooned with red, white and purple flowers, and flanked by two American flags.

Crackling rifles pierced the chilly gray morning as American Legion Post 437 of Westford offered a 21-gun salute.

Later at Veterans Memorial Park, Army Lt. Col. Sam Poulten addressed a crowd gathered amidst stone monoliths bearing



Robert Page, senior vice commander of the Lowell Veterans Council, addresses fellow veterans at the Polish American Veterans Club yesterday morning.

SUN/JAMIE LYNN GIAMBRONE

the names of local men and women who served in battle. Poulten and his son Benari have both served overseas since the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001.

"I thank God my son and I came back whole, and I ask you to think of those who didn't," Poulten said. "As long as one of us is left alive, we will remember."

At the Korean War Memorial in Billerica, veterans of Korea, Vietnam and World War II gathered around the stone sculpture with their families to pay tribute to their fallen friends and those serving overseas today. An honor guard hoisted flags as a lone bugler played the "Star Spangled Banner" and "Taps." The aging soldiers said a prayer, saluted and listened to a poem written by Korean War veteran Lenny Buckman.

"Today is a day for tributes and blessings. For those who served and died. Their names forever engraved at these places where heroes reside," Buckman read.

The 30 or so people moved to the Town Common, where a new memorial

featuring the names of local soldiers killed in World War I and II. The veterans repeated the ceremony for the first time in front of the monument, on which Buckman's poems are engraved.

Pepperell veterans paid tribute outside VFW Post 3291 on Leighton Street next to the boulder monument with the names of all Pepperell residents who served in Vietnam.

Ray Hurley, post chaplain, said he hoped the men and women fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan will return home "to join the ranks of us older veterans."

Others making remarks were state Rep. Bob Hargraves, R-Groton, Charlyne Stumpf, president of the post's Ladies Auxiliary and Susan Boklaga, the Ladies Auxiliary's chaplain.

A group of Cub Scouts and some 30 onlookers watched as five veterans fired three shots each into the gray sky.

Sun staff reporters Peter Ward, Tom Spoth, Christine Phelan and Matt Murphy contributed to this report.

Appeals court KOs new trial in drunk-drive fatal

Ex-Pepperell man remains imprisoned in accident that killed two students

By LISA REDMOND
Sun Staff

BOSTON — The state Appeals Court has denied a new trial to a former Pepperell man serving 28 years in state prison for a drunken-driving crash that killed two North Middlesex Regional High School students in 1999.

In a recent decision, the court rejected Irving Chapman's arguments that he should be granted a new trial due to errors during his March 2000 trial.

Chapman was convicted of two counts of felony motor vehicle homicide for the Jan. 2, 1999, deaths of high school sweethearts Betsie Hughes, 19, of Townsend and Sean Wellington, 18, of Pepperell.

Prosecutor Edward Bedrosian argued that Chapman was legally drunk with a blood-alcohol level of .17 — more than twice the legal limit of .08 — when his one-ton dump truck drifted across the center line of Route 119 in Groton, sheering the door off one pickup truck, slamming head-on into Wellington's Jetta in Groton before hitting a third car and flipping onto its side.

Wellington and Hughes both died from massive head injuries.

In 1989, Chapman pleaded guilty to misde-

meanor motor vehicle homicide for a 1988 accident that killed Shawn Kinsman, 17, another North Middlesex student. The charge was a misdemeanor because there was no proof that drugs or alcohol were involved.

In deaths of Hughes and Wellington, Judge Susan Garsh sentenced Chapman to 18 to 22 years in state prison. Chapman, then 33, considered the sentence too harsh and appealed.

In a rare move, the Appeals Court in May 2001 increased Chapman's sentence to 28 to 30 years in prison, according to the Middlesex County District Attorney's Office.

The state Appeals Court has the option of increasing a sentence, decreasing it or doing nothing.

Despite the Appeal Court's decision, Chapman can still appeal the sentence and the verdict to the state's highest court, the Supreme Judicial Court.

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Chapman

Police: Speed likely to blame in fatal crash

By MEAGHAN WIMS
Sun Staff

NASHUA — Speed was likely a factor in a crash early Tuesday that killed a 21-year-old Nashua man, state police have determined from preliminary investigations.

Christopher Connelly was driving south on the Everett Turnpike at about 12:30 a.m. when his 2004 Honda Civic crashed into a concrete bridge abutment at the Exit 1 off-ramp, according to Trooper Jeffrey Tenczar, a member of the

accident reconstruction unit. Connelly was driving alone, and no one else was hurt. He was pronounced dead at the scene.

The speed limit on the off-ramp is 45 mph. Police determined Connelly was exceeding that limit, but are still determining just how fast he was going, Tenczar said.

"Due to the high rate of speed, he lost control of the car, hitting a bridge abutment and ejecting him from the vehicle," Tenczar said yesterday.

The police are continuing to investigate.

Assault, mayhem charges dropped in attack on home

LOWELL — A 19-year-old man has had charges against him dropped after he was accused of being part of a group that pelted a Franklin Street home with bricks, rocks and beer bottles during a baby shower, hitting one girl in the face with a brick, prosecutors said.

Viseth Keo, no address available, had charges of mayhem and assault and battery by dangerous weapon (brick) dropped by the Middlesex District Attorney's office after wit-

nesses to the Sept. 28, 2002 fight at 46 Franklin St. in Lowell could not be located.

Similar charges against three other Lowell teens — Soksoursdey Roeng, Phanna Sarom and Khomphay Lavongsa — were dropped by prosecutors after a judge allowed a motion to suppress.

Only Tha Heng pleaded guilty to four counts of assault with a dangerous weapon. He was sentenced to up to 1½ years in state prison.

— LISA REDMOND

Former Dracut, Pelham man charged with theft — again

By LISA REDMOND
Sun Staff

LOWELL — Prosecutors say Walter Coleman is just bad at being a thief.

Every time he tried to rob a store or break into a car within the past seven months, they say, he's been arrested. And that's been the story of his criminal life.

"His record dates back 25 years," prosecutor Todd Grossman said in court recently. "Mr. Coleman is a thief and not a very good one, judging by his record."

The 43-year-old former resident of Dracut and Pelham was ordered held on \$15,000 cash bail after pleading innocent in Lowell Superior Court to a bevy of larceny charges in three separate cases.

Coleman has been charged in a Feb. 5 break-in at Anton's Cleaners on Bridge Street in Lowell. He allegedly broke through a locked back door at 5 a.m., only to be confronted by the owner.

Shortly afterward, Dracut police found Coleman sleeping in a car outside a Dracut store. He fit the description given by the Anton's owner, who picked Coleman from a photo array.

Six months later, Coleman, free on personal recognizance, allegedly tried to rob the Dunkin' Donuts on Chelmsford Street in Lowell. Gross-

man said that Coleman, along with co-defendant Ronald Bunker, walked into the store at 10:15 p.m. on July 31. While they waited in line, Coleman allegedly pulled a bandana up around his face and held a knife against his leg. Bunker allegedly hid a baseball bat.

A customer saw Coleman and told employees there was a robbery in progress. Coleman and Bunker were still at the store when police arrived. The penniless pair said they were there to buy coffee.

Bunker, 50, of Lowell, was charged with attempting to commit a crime, and is now wanted by police after defaulting on his court appearance. Coleman was again either released on no bail or low bail in district court.

On Aug. 16, Coleman was again arrested by Lowell police after he was spotted looking in cars in the area of University Avenue. While questioning Coleman, police said they found a towel nearby that held a number of compact discs. They also found two women's bracelets and a necklace in his pocket.

Several witnesses told police they saw Coleman in two cars. One of the car owners identified the CDs and the necklace as having been stolen from her car.

Coleman's next court appearance is Tuesday.

Sex offender guilty in girlfriend's assault

By LISA REDMOND
Sun Staff

LOWELL — A convicted sex offender is behind bars again after a jury found him guilty of assaulting his girlfriend by knocking her down months after she had his baby.

After a two-day trial, Lowell Superior Court Judge Ralph Gants sentenced Robert Sigman, 31, of Lowell, to 4-5 years in state prison, followed by four years of probation, after he was found guilty of assault and battery on his former girlfriend — the mother of his two children — and intimidating a witness.

The jury cleared him of two counts of assault with a dangerous weapon. Two counts of assault and battery and violating a restraining order were dismissed.

Sigman, a level 3 sex offender, has a 1994 conviction for molesting and raping a child under 14. He also pleaded guilty that same year to indecent assault and battery on a person over 14 and assault and battery with a dangerous weapon. He was sentenced to four years and one month in state prison.

Prosecutor Elizabeth

Dunigan said that on Feb. 16, 2002, Lowell police were dispatched to 154 Beacon St., in the Centralville section of Lowell, for a 911 hangup.

The incident began with an argument between Sigman, who had been drinking, and his sister-in-law over his criticism of her care of her severely disabled son.

When his girlfriend, who had a baby three months earlier, stepped between the two, Sigman grabbed a kitchen knife and threatened to kill both women, the children and his brother, then himself, prosecutors alleged.

As the girlfriend started to call police, Sigman tackled her from behind and damaged the phone, but the 911 call had already gone through. He allegedly hit himself with the knife, drawing blood, and then fled the house. He returned the next morning, and police arrested him.

Defense attorney Jeanne Earley argued that although there were tensions in the house, there was no physical evidence of an assault. Police did not retrieve the knife nor see any blood.

Lisa Redmond's e-mail address is lredmond@lowellsun.com.

PARKING REGULATIONS

Town of Dracut LEGAL NOTICE

Snow and Ice Removal Program winter of 2004-2005. The Public is hereby notified that in order to keep the streets and ways open to the motoring public, and for the public safety of the entire community, the following Town By-Laws will be strictly enforced throughout the entire 2004-2005 winter months.

Section 1. It shall be unlawful for the operator or person in charge of any vehicle, other than acting in an emergency, to park said vehicle on any public street on any day, between the hours of 12 midnight and 6:00 A.M., between December 1st and March 15th.

Section 2. For any violation of the provision of Section 1, an offender may be punished by a fine not exceeding fifteen dollars (\$15.00).

Signed,
Michael R. Buxton
Public Works Director