



MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

CHUCK F. LATHROP

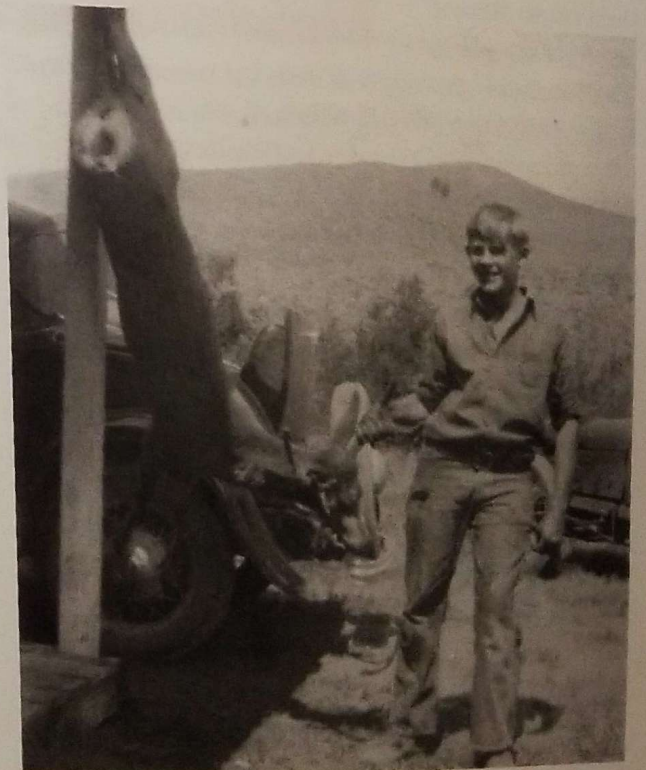
BY BEKAH K. NEVINS

"The secret of genius is to carry the spirit of the child into old age, which means never losing your enthusiasm." - Aldous Huxley

Editors Note: "Months ago, while speaking with former KYH Editor Jim Mitchell, Jim mentioned to me that one idea for the magazine he had but never accomplished as Editor, was to interview and publish the life stories of some of the Club's unique great people. I've implemented Jim's idea but admit it is difficult selecting candidates for this purpose as almost the entire Club membership fit the profile of unique and great people with lives that have been lived to the fullest. I had planned to interview Bert Klineberger for the first of what I hope to be a series of articles and had my plane ticket booked to Seattle, but the Good Lord decided He needed Bert before I could get there. Fortunately Chuck Lathrop lived close by, in Ellensburg, Washington. So I made the decision and drove instead to interview Chuck. I was not disappointed. I am grateful for the help of member Arlein Anderson and for the creative writing by Bekah Nevins for this story but of course, I might be accused of being biased. Enjoy!"
KYH 'Chief' Editor: Gunnar Klarr

On a windy winter day in January 1919 a boy was born in the small town of Winfield, Kansas along the Walnut River. The boy's parents named him Charles, after his father, Charles H. Lathrop, but called him Chuck. Little did that young Lathrop family in early 1919 know that baby Chuck would grow up to lead a life filled with spirited adventure

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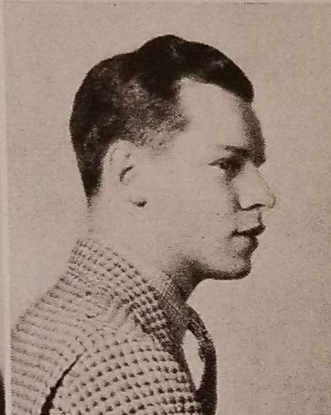
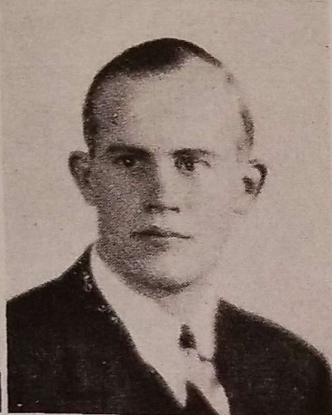


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and endless enthusiasm continuing on nearly 100 years later. From ranching and oil, encounters with movie stars and military generals, hunting trips that spanned months, to Shikar-Safari meetings that felt like they spanned months, and everything in between - Chuck Lathrop is indeed a rare species that is beloved by friends new and old.

Those who meet Chuck are always struck by his "X factor" - maybe it is the way his clear eyes twinkle a little, or his smirking smile as he tells tale after tale of interesting encounters he has gotten himself into (and out of) over the decades. Like all "X factors" it is difficult to really say

exactly what it is about Chuck that leaves such an impression on his many friends and acquaintances. For the author, I was amazed by Chuck's desire to dance at a Shikar meeting several years ago in which we danced not just one song but several, with gusto, and with a surprise neck-kiss and the end of each one (to be fair, Chuck has the height of a person born in 1919 which about brings him to neck-kissing height on me).

I believe Chuck enjoys women who enjoy hunting. In fact, it was his own mother, Ethyl Davis, who really introduced him to hunting and instilled in him a love of the outdoors many years

ago. Chuck's mother Ethyl and her family were from Kansas and had the good fortune of running a family farm on which oil from the famous El Dorado oil field was found. Being one of five children, Chuck's mother shared 1/5th of this oil that afforded her the ability to travel a little with young Chuck and teach him how to do some hunting. When Chuck was just two years old his parents up and moved to California and by the time he was seven Charles and Ethyl were divorced.



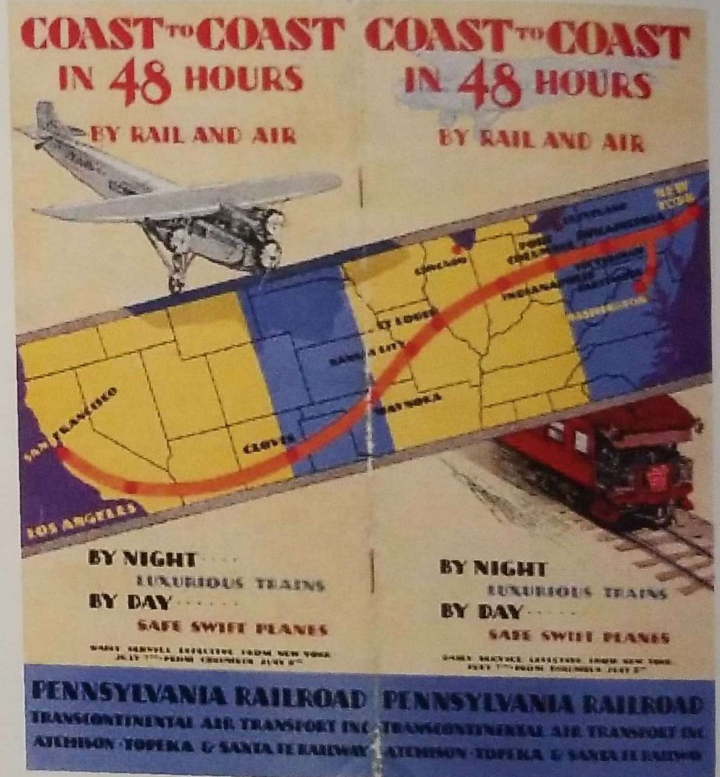


Despite living with his father in Los Angeles, Ethyl frequently took young Chuck on small trips so they could spend time together. This is how Chuck first came to experience hunting and the great outdoors. If it wasn't a hunting trip, his mother was taking him to shoot targets for the day or do a little camping. Chuck went on his first hunt when he was nine years old shooting dove and ducks near Mexicali, Mexico with his mother. When he was 15 (in 1934), at Ethyl's encouragement, he set off into the Sierra Nevada Mountains on a solo deer hunt in which he successfully killed a deer with his new 30-30 rifle. Obviously a great marksman, Chuck has the NRA to thank in part for that as he was enrolled in a Junior NRA shooting program at a very young age.

Clearly Chuck was a natural outdoorsman at a young age but he also was a Los Angelan that had its positives - especially in the 1930s. During this time America was enjoying peace after World War I and L.A. felt like an idyllic center of the world to Chuck. The city felt so safe that Chuck's high school friend Betty (whom would later marry) used to roller skate from her house in Santa Monica to the Lathrop's house eight miles away and then return home at night (Chuck's advice: don't attempt that today!). Chuck was also a neighborhood friend with Jackie Coogan who was the star of Charlie Chaplin's silent film 'The Kid' and is considered the first child star in Hollywood. Chuck, Jackie, and most of the kids from his neighborhood would routinely hitch hike to the beach where for 10 cents you could get a hamburger and a beach towel for the day.

Although Chuck's California life seemed idyllic, it would soon be forced to change thanks to that monumental American crisis known as the Great Depression. Prior to sixth grade Chuck attended a private military academy in Irvine, California. After his parents were hit hard by the depression he was forced to leave the academy to attend public school.

Fortunately, his father was a smart businessman who was able to recover relatively well. Charles Sr. helped finance the first L.A. airline called Maddux



Airlines that flew to San Francisco and San Diego from the L.A. airport (simply a glorified wheat field at the time). Chuck remembers going to the inaugural ceremony and meeting the famous aviator Charles Lindbergh who had just flown the airline's new plane across the country from Detroit to L.A. (Flying across the country in those days was quite a journey as all flying was done using VFR - making flying at night unsafe. So a flight from New York to Los Angeles would take you about three days including two overnight stops). Young Chuck would have many experiences with Lindbergh in the years to come thanks to his father's rise in the aviation business. Maddux Airlines eventually became Western Air Express and Charles Sr. became vice president of the



The 37th Combat Engineer Battalion.



Japanese General Tomouki Yamashita surrenders.

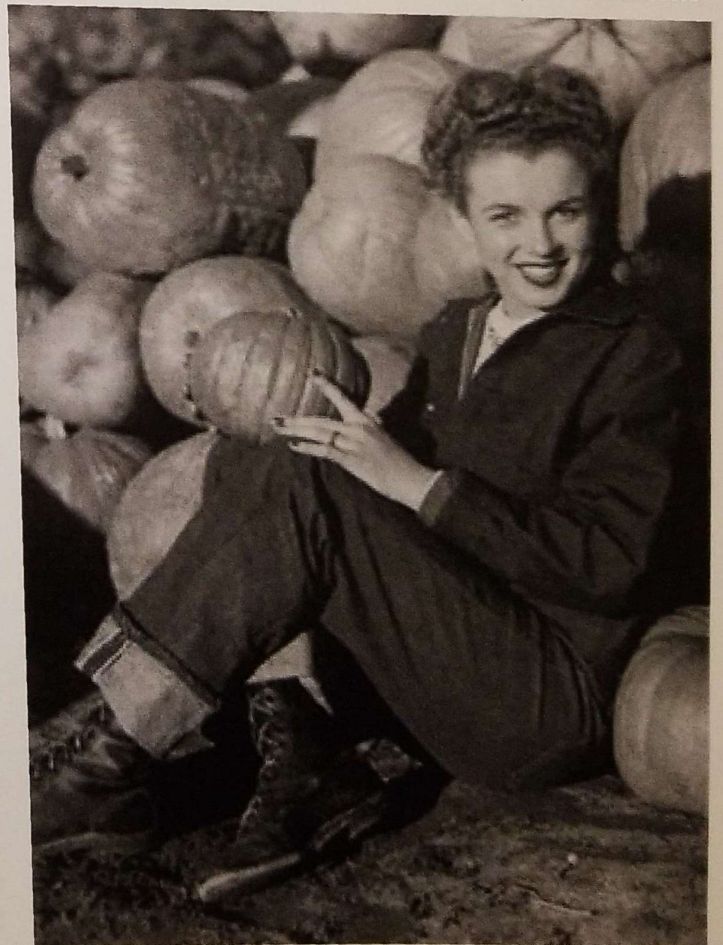
airlines. Western Air Express soon became Trans-Continental that eventually became the famous TWA.

In 1941 at 21 years old, Chuck and his childhood sweetheart Betty decided to get married. However, the honeymoon was short lived as war was looming and in 1942 Chuck joined the Army as an engineer. Chuck entered the war as a captain because he had already completed ROTC. Captain Lathrop soon shipped off to England with the 37th Combat Engineer Battalion. Chuck's battalion was responsible for building the "Bailey Amphibious" floating bridges that were so crucial to crossing the vast rivers throughout the war in Europe. Being a talented engineer, Chuck quickly became a key figure in his unit. In fact, immediately prior to the invasion of France, Chuck spent an entire day alone with General Van Fleet - General Eisenhower's second in command, explaining to him exactly how the bridges worked so Van Fleet could report back to Eisenhower. Clearly Chuck's bridges passed inspection as D-Day went ahead.

After the fall of Germany, the war was not over for Chuck. His battalion soon shipped out for the Philippines to assist in the Pacific. Once again, Chuck was involved in a key moment in the war when he was one of just a few American soldiers who witnessed the informal surrender of infamous Japanese general Tomouki Yamashita (who was later hanged for war crimes).

Finally, the war over, Chuck tested out a variety

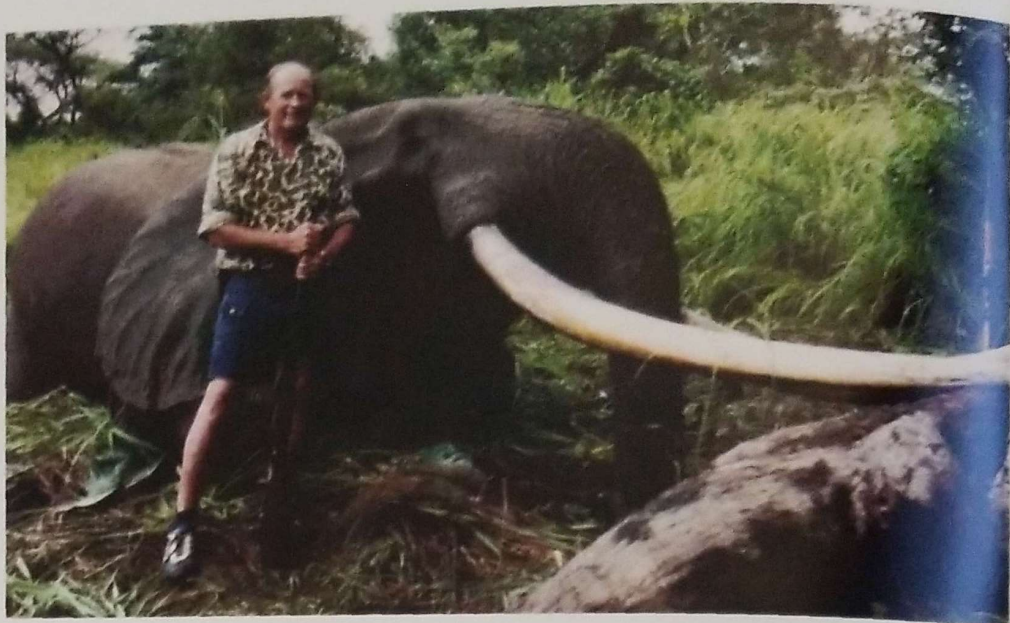
of industries and interests. He did everything from sourcing airplane parts for the new Philippine Airlines to picking up photography. His photography interest again put him at the right place at the right time when he was one of the first to photograph a young model named Norma Jeane, aka Marilyn Monroe. However, investments



Norma Jeane, aka Marilyn Monroe.

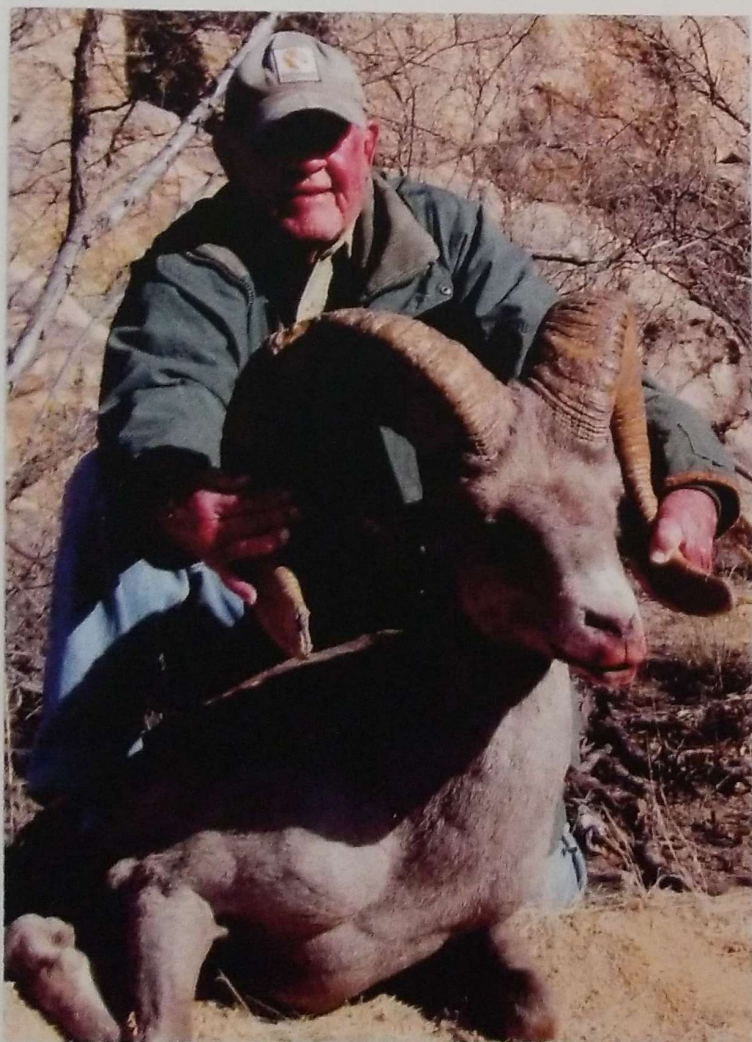


were what Chuck eventually came to be most successful in. After the devastating effects of the depression, Chuck's relatives were all very conservative in their financial approach. His uncle started an investment bond business out of Wichita, Kansas and showed Chuck the ropes to careful investing. Chuck caught on quickly and soon purchased a working farm in Wichita that he rented out to farmers and was able to turn a profit.



Not long after the end of World War II, Chuck was eager to pick up his favorite pastime - hunting. He traded his childhood 30-30 for a cheap 30.06 since 30.06 ammunition was abundant and inexpensive after the war. Chuck spent the next several years mostly hunting in Utah, California, Wyoming, and

British Columbia but his big dream was always to go to Africa. As a young boy, his mother had read to Chuck about the mysterious continent. Chuck was so enamored with Africa he memorized many of the books his mother would read to him and they would take turns reciting the stories back to each other when he was a boy.



In 1965, Chuck's African dream came true when he travelled to Tanzania with his wife Betty. During this 45-day hunt, Betty and Chuck both hunted ("She shot as much as I did!" says Chuck) and enjoyed every moment of the adventure. In fact, they enjoyed it so much they decided to extend their trip to Mozambique and continued hunting there. When they eventually returned home, they immediately started planning their next adventure that led them on a 60-day hunt through the National Parks in Uganda, Kenya, and Tanzania.

Sometime in the late 1970s, Chuck saw an advertisement in Ducks Unlimited for a \$1400, five-day hunt in Spain. He and Betty eagerly booked the trip and enjoyed their time so much they contacted the booking agent to rebook. The booking agent fortuitously suggested the Lathrop's should try shooting in England as well for comparison. So off Betty and Chuck went to England that is where they would meet another hunting-passionate couple from Chicago named Sally and Bill Searle. The Searle's were staying at the same hunting lodge and soon struck up a



friendship with the Lathrop's. Chuck describes their first conversation starting as he was speaking loudly (a frequent habit of his) about an elephant he had shot in the C.A.R. (which he just happened to bring a photograph of). This peaked Bill Searle's interest! Bill asked to see the photograph and was pretty impressed by the 106 x 110 pound bull. After a great time in England together the Searle's invited the Lathrop's to attend the 1980 Shikar-Safari Club meeting at the Biltmore in Arizona as their guests. In 1981 Chuck became a Shikar member with Bill and Sally Searle and Gordon Lisser as his sponsors. The rest is history.

With big game hunts spanning over six decades, one would think perhaps it would be difficult for Chuck to choose his favorite. But when asked about his most special hunts, Chuck quickly identifies his deer hunt with his mother when he was a young boy and his hunts in Africa with Betty where they would hunt one month and go relax on the beach the next month. Chuck never had a desire to have a hunting "list" - a big checklist of animals he wanted to hunt. Instead, he focused on places he loved to go and specific animals he loved to hunt. Chuck would frequently return to those beloved places and hunts instead of checking it off and moving to the next place.

The world has moved on from Chuck's heyday and in this day and age a hunter can easily jet or helicopter right into and out of these remote places. Like many hunters of the great decades of the 20th century - this frustrates a man like Chuck. "Everything also seems to be in a hurry-up pace instead of many days and weeks exploring

vast terrain," he says. Chuck would encourage hunters to focus a little less on checking animals off one's list and instead enjoy your trip and adventure in a more relaxed manner. The other concerns Chuck has for the hunters in this day and age are not unique to him. The marketing-obsessed, luxury-focused, smaller concession aspects of hunting are a far cry from the hunts of his life where, for example, he often would have to light a kerosene lamp to put in front of his tent just to keep the lions out.

Chuck Lathrop is a man who has carried that child-like enthusiasm with him throughout his long life. He's seen friends, countries, and animals come and go but has maintained his love of living. His beloved childhood sweetheart Betty was diagnosed with Alzheimer's in the 1990s that eventually took her life. Even though she could not remember him and their many adventures side by side, Chuck made sure he saw her every single day during her illness. Chuck still says by far the best thing he ever did in his life was to marry Betty.

There is something about Chuck that has endeared him to many people the world over. Perhaps it is hard to put your finger on exactly what it is but I believe his tremendous capacity to love - adventures, wilderness, people, living is his greatest achievement. And that is a certainly a life well lived.



Chuck with the author of this article, Bekah Nevins.