

## **Eulogy for Leonard Alvin Denney**

*by Bud Denney*

Leonard Alvin Denney was born in Ola, Arkansas in Yell County. For all the fans who remember him at sporting events, Yell County makes a lot of sense. Ola, Arkansas had a population of 1,227 in the 2000 census; his affinity for small towns now makes sense as well.

Leonard was not Leonard Sr. “I wasn’t born with Sr. on my birth certificate,” he often said. Mostly he was Len, or Mr. Denney, by those who worked for him, and “Sarge” by Lou’s brothers. But, after retirement from the civil service if you called him Mr. Denney, you would be reminded that his name was Leonard.

In 1962 SMSgt (Senior Master Sergeant), Leonard A. Denney was nominated for “Outstanding Airman of the Year.” Because of this, we have the following Biographical Report used in the submission for this award.

“SMSgt Leonard A. Denney was born in Ola Arkansas, December 24, 1926. He attended the first through the ninth grades of school at Springfield Missouri, tenth grade at Long Beach, California, and eleventh grade at Culver City, California.

Sgt Denney entered military service February 1945. He received his basic training as an Infantry Rifleman at Camp Roberts, California. He was sent overseas to the Philippine Islands in August of 1945 and was assigned to the 121<sup>st</sup> Field Artillery Battalion, 32<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division, as a radio repairman. In November 1945 he was transferred with this organization to Japan for Occupation Duty. In January 1946 Sgt Denney was transferred to the 1718<sup>th</sup> Signal Service Company. It was determined at this time that he had not received formal training as a radio repairman and as a result he was sent to AFWESPAC Signal Corps School. After completing the radio repairmans course he returned to Japan and in October 1946 was returned to the ZI for discharge.

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After receiving his discharge he returned to Los Angeles where he re-entered High School and completed the requirement to receive a diploma in June of 1946.

Sgt Denney re-enlisted in the Air Force in November 1947. He was assigned to McChord AFB, Washington. In October of 1948 he was transferred to Germany TDY for duty on the Berlin Airlift. He was returned to his home station in March 1949 and was assigned to Detachment duty at Neah Bay, Washington.

While stationed at Neah Bay Sgt Denney met Mary Lou Parker who became his wife in December of 1949. Their first of four children was born in November of 1950, a girl. Their second girl was born in May 1952. Sgt Denney was transferred at this time to Kadena AFB, Okinawa. He was joined overseas by in family in June of 1953. After completion of his overseas tour Sgt Denney was assigned as an electronic instructor at Scott AFB, Illinois, Air Training Command. While serving at this assignment his son was born in May 1957. In June 1959 Sgt Denney was assigned to Det 205, 1155 TOS. At this time his family returned to their home town, Neah Bay, Washington. After completing this overseas tour he was assigned to 1155 tech Ops, Sq, McClellan AFB, Calif. His family accompanied him to this station. His fourth child, a girl was born there in May of 1961. He received his promotion to Senior Mater Sergeant 1 Mar 1962.

SMSgt Leonard A. Denney has continually exhibited outstanding performance in the daily performance of his assigned duties. As one example he was selected to complete the initial installation and checkout of a highly complex technical electronics system in a foreign country, the specific identification of which is classified. Even though he encountered extreme difficulties in transportation, language, diplomatic arrangement and adverse weather, this mission was accomplished on schedule and in such a manner as to

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warrant verbal commendations from the recipients of his actions. In addition to his normal duties, his skill and adaptability has qualified him for the exacting and demanding assignment of roving trouble shooter and technical expert for a world-side system of highly technical electronic equipment. He is very energetic and is completely willing to work long hours of off-duty time to accomplish his assignment.

SMSgt Denney is extremely well-liked by his associates and his exemplary personal appearance and courtesy is always a model for junior airmen.”

Leonard retired from the Air Force on 31 July 1966. The Air Force that Leonard joined in November 1947 won its independence as a full partner with the Army and the Navy on September 18, 1947. When he retired in 1966, we were not sure it would survive without him.

The Air Force outlines his career in the service in a succinct narrative. He was proud to serve this nation, even getting his father, Benjamin to lie about his age in order to join the army, but done only when his mother, Ruth was away from home. Leonard was known as Bud to his family in Missouri. His sister Beulah called him “little brother Bud”, in that long drawn out Ozark hillbilly twang that she had. She visited Neah Bay a number of times and always enjoyed it here.

Moving 183 miles to Springfield, Missouri where he lived for at least 10 years proved to be the second longest place he called home. Neah Bay proved to be the place he called home for the longest period of his life. Moving became the normal way of living for the Denney family. They bought a home in Washington DC, where he was last stationed at USAF HQ, working directly for a presidential task force.

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The Denney family hosted many family members and friends to see the sites in DC. They would often make the 3000 mile drive to Neah Bay, a five day drive by car, three days in Montana, to visit Lou's family.

They joined the Presbyterian Church in Alexandria, Virginia. Leonard was convinced to help coach little league baseball by other church members. Leonard brought his son to a baseball field where hundreds of kids were standing around. Leonard was asked if he was there to help, when he said yes, he was instructed to pick 25 kids and that would be his team. "No, not my team, I'm here to help," he said. Picking your team and getting some parents to help you will be a big help they said. Dad picked 25 kids, but not before his son was picked by another coach. After a few games into the season, Leonard arranged to have his son join his team by making a trade. Bud always said he was the player to be named later. Leonard coached little league baseball in Neah Bay as well.

Bud was surprised to find out the family had more choices then moving to Los Angeles or Neah Bay when his dad retired from the Air Force. Bud would tell anybody it was Neah Bay or LA and Mom had more family in Neah Bay so Neah Bay won. On one of many trips to Port Angeles Leonard told Bud he could have re-upped and gone to McChord or Hawaii for another four years, or he had a job offer with a little company in Texas called Texas Instruments. We are fortunate that Leonard and Lou chose Neah Bay; it became their home for good in 1966, forty two years for Leonard.

The love of service for the nation became the love of service to a community. Leonard worked for the school for a year before joining the civil service and working at the Neah Bay Air Base until he retired in 1983. Glen Willison, Superintendent said his

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biggest mistake was letting Leonard leave employment at the Neah Bay school.

The Denney's lived in two homes Leonard refurbished before they moved into the home Leonard and Lou now live in. Leonard built that home mostly with his own hands. No banks were lending to build homes on reservation in those days, so Sears was the Denney's mortgage holder. The day the trestle's went up on the roof of the extension of the home, it was like a barn raising with Uncle Bill, Uncle Ty, Uncle John, Mr. Mac, and Uncle Gene among others helping to line them up and tie them down; all under the close supervision of Grandpa Tom.

Working for the civil service at the Air Base meant more training trips for Leonard. Dale recalls the many times he was sent TDY while in the service and recalls Lou always prepared a picnic when Leonard returned. The family would celebrate his return at the beaches at Hobuck. This tradition continued when he would return from training.

Leonard was a good provider to his family, what they couldn't buy, he would build. The first color TV in the Denney home was a kit Leonard built.

Leonard started a small business that he called LAD Electronics. He helped repair almost any electronic device the fishermen could throw at him.

High School sports became one of Leonard's pass times, though Lou would make sure that she wasn't sitting near Leonard, who sat next to Bill Arnold, both of whom never saw a ref they liked and had no qualms about letting them know what they thought. Remember, he was born in Yell County.

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Leonard brought the TV translators to Neah Bay and one of his LAD Electronics accounts was the maintenance of that system. The relay came from Port Angeles and through a site on burnt mountain, so the upkeep was not only trips up to the Gator site here in Neah Bay, but to the relay site off reservation as well.

Leonard and Lou thought they were going to be out of the sports fans business when Bud graduated in 1975. But, it turned out the real athlete in the family was Melonee, the baby. Thanks to Title IX, the WIAA welcomed the girls into their fold in Mel's freshman year. Mel told her Dad, "you went to all of Bud's games; you're going to mine aren't you." Mel could talk to her Dad like none of the others would dare. When they really wanted something, they would send Mel in to do the Daddy asking.

Despite the fact that Dad set up electronic monitoring devices to spy on Russia and their nuclear bomb testing, Mel actually thought she could sneak by her Dad. Coming in late one night she put her shoes by the door, because Dad first checked there to make sure she was home. She snuck to her room as he made coffee. She slipped into bed and looked sound asleep as he looked in and announced to Lou that she's home. Later that day, he came home to dry out some mole killing devices in the oven. Unfortunately, they blew up in the oven and he ran to Mel's room and told her she needed to get out of the house. She said "no, dad." "Get out now!" She blew her cover as she got out of bed still fully dressed to leave the home because her Dad was afraid he was poisoning her.

He was a proud grandfather when the grand children started arriving. Sharon remembers she was grandpa's helper when she was six years old and got to travel across country pulling a travel trailer in 1976. It was Sharon's job to help him keep track of his glasses. She helped him twist the handle to raise the trailer in order to hitch it or unhitch it to the car. The day they started off to go to Washington DC, Sharon fell asleep as they left before dawn.

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She woke up as they drove around Lake Crescent and Leonard remembers her asking, “are we almost there yet?”

When Mel lived in Forks, Michelle, Hazel and Joey were supposed to catch the bus back to Forks. They were busy lighting off fireworks on the beach, and sure enough, they missed the bus. Michele and Joey told Hazel to go tell Grandpa what had happened, after they had chased the bus as far as where the mini mart is now. They sent Hazel in because “he loves you and he won’t get mad at you.” They all saw the curled tongue and Leonard put the kids in the car, caught up to the bus in Clallam Bay and put them on board there. “Next time don’t miss the bus.”

Hazel remembers one of the biggest fights she ever saw Leonard and Lou have. Hazel talked gramps into tossing bread crumbs to the birds while Hazel used Gramps BB gun to try to shoot one. “How could you let her do that? !!” Lou yelled at Leonard.

Leonard used to let the grand kids ride with him while he mowed the lawn. Then he began letting them drive while they sat in his lap. Then he was letting them drive it around in the yard. “As long as you don’t go past two,” he told them. When he got out of sight they’d gun the lawn mower to six. Soon, the whole cycle began all over again this time in his old pickup truck he used to drive to work up the hill in.

The grandkids knew that if they had anything that broke, grandpa could fix it. His kids knew he would work on their cars for them, only it had to be built in American he told them.

Leonard used to volunteer to put up the PA system for Makah Days. You knew it was Makah Days when Leonard was stringing speaker wires down Front Street.

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When they started building houses on the 200 line, Leonard was subcontracted to put in a system in order that they could receive a TV signal from the translators. He wired all the homes to receive the signal from a relay dish near the bottom of the hill. The signal was sent to the homes underground, and he wired each home built to receive the signal. Cable had reached Neah Bay!

At one tribal election Dale asked why Dad wasn't voting, "he's lived here as long as anybody else" she said. Leonard wanted Lou to run for the tribal council many times. And just as many times she said no. The year she finally said yes, she suffered her first stroke at the annual Makah Day's luncheon they were always hosts to and became unable to stand for election.

Leonard and Lou were married on December 23<sup>rd</sup>. Leonard's birthday was December 24<sup>th</sup> and this was followed by Christmas on the 25<sup>th</sup>. Trying to buy him gifts three days in a row became a tough task for his children and his grandchildren alike. You knew if he didn't have it, he could build it. He was patient at teaching, a self made man who made a career out of serving his country and then for serving this community. He seemingly had a gruff exterior, but he was tender at heart. Leonard and Lou would have celebrated their 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary this December. He fought hard to live to see that. He fought hard, though in his final years he hated not being able to get around, to fix things in the house, to fix things for everybody as he did before. When he was ready to give up, Lou's will kept him going. His father died at a young age, Leonard was sure he would too. He said he was never going to see his 60<sup>th</sup> birthday, and then it was his 70<sup>th</sup> birthday. For the past six years he would tell one or more of his grandchildren that this would be his last Christmas. Leonard and Lou, 59 years of marriage, blessed with four children, 13 grand children and eight great grand children. The sporting events continued, and Leonard and Lou supported their off spring as well as others from his adopted home of Neah Bay.



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A self made man who made many things he owned with his own hands. He arrived in Neah Bay in March of 1949 and married Lou in December. Lou said her Mom and dad loved him before she did. Hazel, Lou's Mom arranged to have Leonard bring her to Port Angeles. She was testing him to see if he would be ashamed of being seen taking her around town. As with any test he was given, he passed with flying colors!

Leonard, in service to this nation, to this community and to his family for 82 years, with more than half his life devoted to the community of Neah Bay. He loved it here, he loved the people here. He loved the family that adopted him, and the community that adopted his children. Most of all he loved Lou. In a card given to Lou on their 24<sup>th</sup> anniversary it said,

“Happy Anniversary -- Happiness Always

I love you for your thoughtfulness  
Your understanding way.  
And for the countless “little things”  
You do for me each day  
I love you for the hopes and dreams  
You've helped to make come true  
But most of all I love you Dear  
Just for being you”

He wrote these words below the verse,

“These words express the sentiment of our happy day, but my great feelings for you come from my heart” Yours always Len.

Leonard, Dad, grandpa, gramps, we will miss you, from our hearts, always.