

FROM THIS CORNER

BY

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### CHIEF GEORGE JACOB "BUCK" CAPTAIN

"I see changes" George Jacob "Buck" Captain observed about the Eastern Shawnee Tribe of Oklahoma in a 1994 interview preserved in "Always a People: Oral Histories of Contemporary Woodland Indians". The seventh Eastern Shawnee Chief to be elected following the Tribe's adoption of a constitution in 1939, Buck reflected upon his 30 year military career stating, "I didn't know it, but I guess I've had an uncanny ability to figure things out that a lot of people couldn't see. And they turned out to be right, so I kind of established a reputation."

Buck Captain used this "uncanny ability" throughout his life. Born August 14, 1922 in Ottawa County to Thomas A. Captain and Florence Longdan, he was one of nine children: brothers Thurman, John, Charles, Leo and Dennis (Sandy) and sisters Thelma Captain Sullivan, Marjorie (Sue) Captain Kropp, and Virginia Captain Welch Hart. Recalling his early years, Buck relayed, "We lived in an oak house my dad built. I went to a country school, Moccasin Bend District Number 5 and I went through the eighth grade there. My whole childhood was fairly rugged. I was raised during the Depression. We did have plenty to eat. We lived on a farm. We raised everything we had. But we didn't have any money. But we had a lot of company. It wasn't just us. It was everybody."

Following high school graduation, he enlisted in the Air Force. At the age of 23 he married Betty Cole on November 17, 1945 in Baxter Springs, Kansas. Becoming a military career man, Buck served in the Air Force for 30 years serving in the Secret Service Intelligence Department also flying more than 20 missions during World War II. During this time Buck and Betty became the parents of two sons, George Jacob IV and Sandy Nelis Captain.

Buck retired from the military in the 70's, returning to the Miami, OK area and was elected Chief in 1978, a position he held for 18 years until he resigned in 1996 elevating his son Nelis who served as Second Chief to become Chief. Buck explained it this way, "When my people moved to Oklahoma . . . our group most of them came from the Chillicothe Division in Ohio. That was the group that most always produced the Chiefs of the Shawnee Nation back in Indiana and Ohio. We always had a chief, my dad, Thomas Andrew Captain was a Chief for over twenty five years and my grandfather before him and so forth."

Buck was an active Chief. In 1984 a third building was constructed on the 58.19 acres originally belonging to Nina Dushane. The first two, an administrative building and an unfinished economic building, had been constructed during Chief James Greenfeather's term which preceded Buck. The third building was the Nutrition Building (now known as the Sandy Captain Cultural Building). Shortly thereafter the empty and unfinished economic building opened on December 7, 1984 as the Eastern Shawnee Tribe of Oklahoma's Bingo operation, catapulting the tribe into the gaming world. As a result of Bingo profits, the tribe made its first land purchase, 112 acres on Highway 10C in 1987.

In 1990, Buck made an unprecedented move. Knowing that the three federally recognized Shawnee Tribes in Oklahoma had not been together as a Nation for almost two hundred years, Buck contacted the Absentee Shawnee Tribe near Little Axe and the Loyal Shawnee Tribe, invited them to a dinner in the Nutrition Building and the rest is history. Governor Kenneth Blanchard, Chairman Ron Sparkman and Chief Buck Captain met and the three tribes have been trying to work together ever since.

The year 1992 saw the construction of the BlueJacket Center, the adoption of a new constitution which made the position of Chief a full-time position and the purchase of the Rickner property, a 60 acre parcel for \$40,000. In 1995 the tribe made its first purchase of 1,750 shares in People's Bank of Seneca at two hundred dollars a share. Today, 2013, it approaches eight hundred a share.

In his last year as Chief, Buck oversaw the establishment of the George F. Captain Library, the tribe becoming a Self-Governance Tribe, and the joint establishment of Bearskin Clinic, a health venture between the Wyandotte and Eastern Shawnee Tribes.

Buck recalled that when the tribe was removed from Ohio, we ended up with 15 hoes, 2 chopping axes and a blacksmith's shop. He thought that was appropriate because it signified that it was up to the individual to make a living. Buck wanted to see the Tribe provide benefits but even more important than that, he observed that in his lifetime, " the biggest change within the tribe has been going from poverty to being capable of holding good jobs. . . .

"I see changes" Buck Captain said—changes that he helped facilitate.