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NRA Past-President, General Joseph

By Philip Schreier

The NRA family lost one of its most beloved members on New Year's Day 2003, when General Joseph J. Foss died at a hospital near his home in Scottsdale, Ariz. He passed away following complications from a brain aneurism suffered shortly before he was to deliver a speech in Michigan last October.

General Foss served the membership of the National Rifle Association as a member of its Board of Directors since 1983, as its President from 1988-1990 and as a member of the Association's Executive Council. In 2000 he was elected to Honorary Life Membership, the highest honor NRA can bestow. He was the third Medal of Honor recipient to serve as NRA president, joining Maj. Gen. Alexander Shaler (NYNG) and Maj. Gen. Merritt A. Edson (USMC).

In a memorial tribute to General Foss, NRA Executive Vice President Wayne LaPierre said, "Joe Foss was the man every American boy once dreamed of becoming. Joe started small, dreamed big and accomplished great things due to the sheer force of his courage and convictions. In many ways, Joe Foss was so much bigger than most of us can even imagine, yet he remained that same down-to-earth Midwesterner throughout his 87 years. Joe will be missed, but never replaced. America may have lost the individual, but the legend will always live on."

Foss grew up in the farmlands of South Dakota and from an early age learned firearm responsibility from a dedicated father who instilled in Joe a respect for firearms, hunting and the outdoor way of life. One transgression with the use of his favorite .22 Remington meant the loss of its use for an entire year. That style of strict but fair discipline instilled in Joe a "respect for the rules" that served him well in his military training and throughout his life.

At the age of 12 he was swept up in the public adulation of Charles Lindbergh, who had just completed his trans-Atlantic flight. Foss was able to see his hero during Lindbergh's visit to Sioux Falls. Foss was determined to learn to fly and began

At one point during World War II, then-Marine Capt. Joe Foss was America's leading ace with 26 aerial victories (l.). His bravery, courage and leadership—traits he demonstrated throughout his life—earned him the Medal of Honor. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt presented the Medal of Honor to Foss at The White House. That event was recorded by Life, and Foss appeared on the magazine's cover (r.). In 1990, NRA President Joe Foss appeared on the cover of Time as well. Foss had been an NRA member off and on since World War II. He became a Life Member in the 1960s and once wrote that when he visited the Oval Office, President John F. Kennedy and he had a lot in common, as "both of us were lifelong members of the National Rifle Association, and we both enjoyed hunting." In 1989, Colt honored then-NRA President Foss with a commemorative .45 ACP Government Model: the "Joe Foss Limited Edition." Foss and his wife, "Didi," proudly worked on many projects to benefit NRA and established The NRA Foundation's Joe and Donna Foss Endowment For Youth Education.

Honorary Life Member

J. Foss, 1915 - 2003



lessons at the age of 22. (During World War II, Foss and "Lucky Lindy" became combat veterans together as well as flying buddies, close friends and, later, NRA Life Members.)

Foss enlisted in the South Dakota National Guard in 1939 and served in the 147th Field Artillery. After graduating from the University of South Dakota in 1940, he joined the United States Marine Corps, earning a reserve commission and pilot's wings in March of 1941. He was considered too old at the age of 27 to become a combat pilot, but managed to talk his way into the program and found himself in the now famous VMF-121 of the Cactus Air Force flying from Henderson Field on Guadalcanal.

At a time when America yearned for "tough guy" heroes, Foss fit the bill perfectly and embodied the romantic notion of the "can do" American spirit. The photo of him chewing a cigar in his "Mae West" lifejacket, leaning against his F-4F Wildcat, is perhaps the best photo of him ever taken. It has, since 1943, become a classic aviator image of World War II.

He soon equaled the record of top American ace Eddie Rickenbacker, who scored 26 victories in World War I and, for a while, held the "Top Ace" record for the United States. His leadership of VMF-121 and its intrepid combat record earned Foss the Medal of Honor, Distinguished Flying Cross and Silver Star. He was awarded the Medal of Honor at a White House ceremony where President Roosevelt personally presented him with the award.

After the medal presentation ceremony in Washington, D.C., Foss went on what he described as "my dancing bear act" by selling war bonds across the country. Anxious to get back into the fight, he finally went on to train and command VMF-115 and flew from Bougainville, Green Island and Emirau Islands. Grounded by malaria for the balance of the war in late 1944, Foss returned to the states to recover and resigned his commission in late 1945.

Following the war, he was a principal founder of the South Dakota Air National Guard's 175th Fighter Squadron

and held the rank of Brigadier General in the Guard, as well as in the United States Air Force Reserve. He repeatedly tried to get a combat mission

assignment during the Korean Conflict but was considered too valuable to risk in a theater of war.

In 1948, he served in the state legislature of South Dakota. He became governor in 1955 and was re-elected to a second term in 1956. In 1955, he signed a deal with Hollywood producer Hall Bartlett to make a film based on his war experiences called "Smokey Joe," because of his cigar habit. John Wayne, a friend and hunting partner of the General, was signed to play Foss. The movie, however, fell through when Foss nixed the story line that included a torrid romance that was entirely fictional and completely uncharacteristic of Joe's personal demeanor.

Following his last term in office as governor, he was selected to head the new American Football League as its Commissioner from its inception in 1959 until shortly before its merger with the NFL in 1966.

On television, he hosted ABC's "American Sportsman" from 1962 until 1965 and "The Outdoorsman—Joe Foss" from 1966 until 1974. He was later to travel extensively and lobby for Royal Dutch Airlines (KLM) and soon became one of the most requested speakers on the lecture circuit throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Foss' plain-spoken manner and folksy way of spinning a yarn made him a favorite with audiences everywhere. His list of personal friends, flying partners, sports fans and hunting buddies reads like a *Who's Who* of late 20th Century popular culture and politics. His advice and counsel were sought and encouraged by every president from Eisenhower through George H.W.

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from heavy loads is awful; a 3½", 2-oz. load of Winchester Supremes at 1300 f.p.s. generates 71.1 ft.-lbs. of free recoil energy in an 8-lb. gun. That's more than a .458 Win. Mag. at 66 ft.-lbs. The 3", 1¾-oz. Supreme loads have significantly lower recoil, about 54 ft.-lbs.; still a lot, but noticeably less painful to shoot than the heavy stuff.

After my head cleared, and I marked and counted holes, my pile of pattern sheets left me no doubt that if I centered 2 ozs. of No. 5s on a turkey at 50 yds., I'd kill it. Frankly, as a traditionalist who doesn't believe in long-range turkey shooting, I had hoped to find otherwise, but the performance of the gun, choke and loads made a believer out of me. However, punching paper and punching tags are two different things. Bear in mind, I had a solid rest to shoot from; this was no test of shooting skill, just equipment. Holding the hot center of a pattern on a turkey's head and neck at 50 yds. isn't easy. Add a crosswind (yes, they do move shot patterns), throw in excited, shaky hands braced on knees cramped from an hour of motionless sitting, and a 50-yd. shot in the field, although makable, is no slam dunk; it's a long three-pointer.

The real problem with 50-yd. shots in the woods isn't so much hitting the bird—although that takes skill—but estimating range accurately. When a turkey steps inside 35 yds. it looks "in range;" you can see details on the bird: eyeballs, feathers, the beak. At 50 yds., a turkey resembles a black blob topped with a smaller white blob, no different than it looks at 60 or 70 yds. Unless you've brought a rangefinder in your vest pocket, it's hard to know exactly when a bird has stepped within the reach of your long-distance turkey gun.

Despite the undeniable long-range effectiveness of the 12 ga., 3½", I still believe turkeys should be shot at 35 yds. or less. Then why shoot a big gun? In a word, confidence. You've got a gun that's a sure killer at 35-40 yds., with plenty of power to spare if you make a mistake in range estimation.

Still, no matter how far away your gun can shoot, the real challenge of the spring woods isn't long-range marksmanship; it's getting inside a turkey's tiny head and fooling him into going someplace he shouldn't—within 35 yds. of a patient, hidden hunter. 


Bush. A lifelong Republican, he was present on the grandstand when President George W. Bush was inaugurated in January 2001.

Foss was active with the Campus Crusade for Christ, The President's Council on Physical Fitness, the Easter Seal Society and dozens of other charitable institutions. His presidency of the NRA earned him a cover on *Time* magazine in 1990. Many have been on the covers of both *Life* and *Time*, but few, if any, have done so 50 years apart and for different accomplishments.

While governor of South Dakota, he befriended the South Dakota Boys State Governor, a youngster by the name of Tom Brokaw. They became fast friends, and Foss was featured in Brokaw's bestselling book *The Greatest Generation*. Brokaw, now the anchor for the NBC Nightly News, was quoted as saying, "... I learned from him the qualities that make him special: a love of people and the outdoors, plain talk, and a zest for life. My life is richer for having known Joe during my formative years." That well-spoken tribute can be echoed by all who were lucky enough to call him a personal friend.

He told it like he saw it—plain, truthful and without unnecessary embellishments or anything resembling self-aggrandizement. He was a man's man, a devoted child of God, an awesome warrior in battle and a passionate patriot in peace. A loving son, husband and father. As Theodore Roosevelt said of his son, "his accomplishments have ennobled his ancestors."

His life was celebrated at the Scottsdale Bible Church in Arizona on January 9, and he was laid to rest with full military honors at Arlington National Cemetery on January 21. His grave site is in Section 7a of the National Cemetery, just below the Tomb of the Unknowns.

The family has requested that memorial contributions be made to: The Joe Foss Institute, 7745 E. Redfield Road, Suite 400, Scottsdale, AZ 85260; (480) 348-0376; or The NRA Foundation, Joe and Donna Foss Endowment for Youth Education, 11250 Waples Mill Road, Fairfax, VA 22030-9400; (800) 554-9498; or at www.nra.org. 

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Living History

By Philip Schreier

Time To Get It Right!



Photos by Lynne McCreedy

"Nae man can tether time or tide"

—Robert Burns

As Burns so simply put it, time can not be tethered, but you can put time on a nice chain or a decent strap and wear something appropriate and authentic to the next military event you attend. So often at reenactments, the simplest of anachronisms can spoil the

whole karma of slipping back in time through the portals living history events offer. How many times have you looked down the ranks and seen some poor guy still wearing a quartz watch and Perry Ellis eye glasses? Well if you are doing a Desert Storm event that might be OK, but at the Second Battle of Manassas it can, shall we say... ruin the moment. (Be warned you farbs out there, proper eye wear will be addressed in a future issue

Many watches, such as this open-face Spanish-American War vintage Waltham, incorporated patriot motifs to appeal to the military buyer.

of Military Classics Illustrated.)

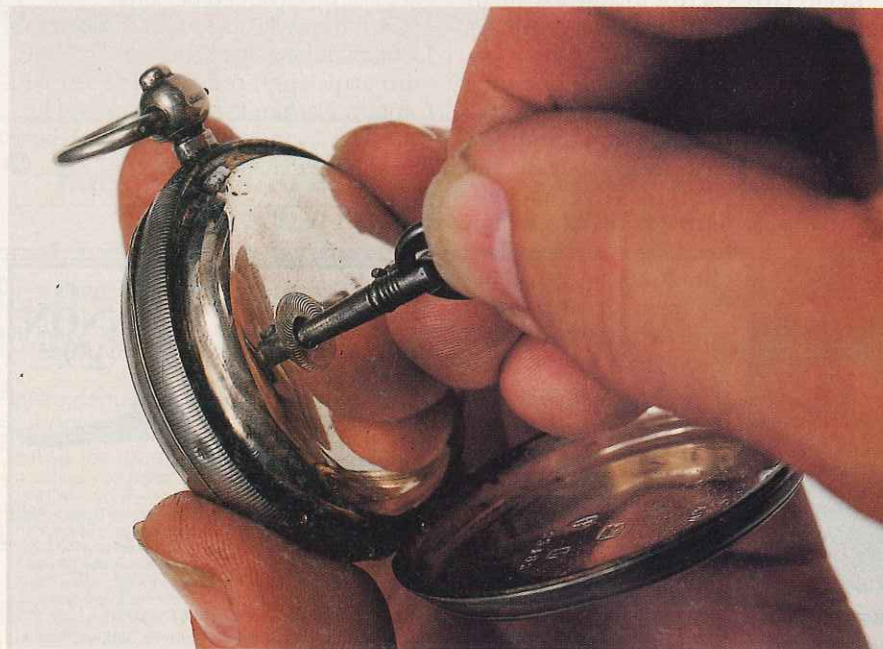
It has been reported that during one scene in the movie *Dances With Wolves*, one Indian raises his arm to deliver a fatal skull-crushing blow to an adversary and you can see what appears to be a Rolex Presidential gold watch strapped to his wrist. Such faux-pas are inexcusable in a feature film but commonplace on the battlefields of today's weekend warriors.

This issues column will attempt to give you a few tips and some interesting information on selecting an appropriate time piece for your impression.

EARLY PERIODS

The first clocks made their appearance in the early to mid-1200s. Much like the room-filling computers of the 1940s & 50s, they were huge and cumbersome, and available only to the richest of the aristocracy. Personal timepieces came into vogue in the mid-1500s and continued to be the accouterments of the wealthy until some 300 years later in the 1850s.

The industrial revolution of the mid-1800s was the catalyst for many changes in society. As goods for the consumer were manufactured on machinery capable of producing interchangeable parts, the price of those goods dropped, making the trappings of the elite available to the common man. Such was the way of watches and firearms in the ante-bellum period.



The earliest of mass-produced pocket watches were wound by a separate key. This would be the proper timepiece for a Civil War impression, as stem winds did not really appear until after the conflict.