The last surviving veteran of World War I, Florence Green, died in 2012 at the age of 110. The Great War of 100 years ago has moved from memory into history. But its importance has not faded — Veterans Day is observed this month as the anniversary of the signing of the armistice ending the Great War and to honor military veterans who served our country.

One of those veterans walked into the Empire Electric Association office several months ago to pay his bill and to proudly share a photo of his family. The photo represented six military veterans, a father and five sons who served in four different wars.

Alex Garcia is 86 years old now and one of the surviving veterans of the Korean War minesweeping team serving at Wonsan Harbor. He wears a baseball hat that proudly announces his service in the U.S. Navy from 1950 to 1953. This is his story.

Only five years after World War II ended, the Cold War suddenly turned hot, bloody and expensive. North Korea invaded South Korea in June 1950, which brought about a United Nations “police action” against the aggressors. The United States still held large quantities of ships, aircraft and military equipment and had the capacity to produce more. The United States took immediate action by committing to heavy military and naval involvement.

At the same time, Alex’s dream-come-true was just beginning. He was accepted at Fort Lewis College in Hesperus. His many years of playing catcher earned him a baseball scholarship. As one of 11 children, it seemed like his best shot at a college education.

Arriving at “the Fort” meant everything. The college was undefeated in football, baseball and basketball, and this was his chance to earn his coveted degree while playing his favorite sport. The only downside to Fort Lewis was out of the 250 students attending that year, only 13 were girls.

But that didn’t matter, because everything changed with the U.S. involvement in Korea.

All of Alex’s Fort Lewis buddies were being drafted. He found himself alone at school, thinking about them and his military heritage. Ben, his older brother, served in the Air Force during World War II as a gunner on a B-17 bomber. He was shot in the knee while on a mission, but continued to serve during the Korean War and later become an aeronautical engineer for Hughes Aircraft. His father, Simon Ben Garcia, served in France during World War I and lost many friends to the effects of mustard gas. Yet, he sang the praises of the military to his sons, saying that he enjoyed...
NOVEMBER CO-OP PHOTO CONTEST WINNER

La Plata Mountains in the Fall – Taylor Hill

CO-OP CALENDAR

NOVEMBER 5, 2017 –
Daylight Saving time ends. Set clocks back one hour.

NOVEMBER 10, 2017 –
The next meeting of the EEA Board of Directors will begin at 8:30 a.m. on Friday, November 10 at EEA headquarters in Cortez. The agenda is posted 10 days in advance of the meeting at www.eea.coop. All members are reminded that public comment is heard at the beginning of the meeting.

NOVEMBER 11, 2017 –
Veterans Day.

NOVEMBER 23-24, 2017 –
Thanksgiving holiday, office is closed.

MY CO-OP EMPLOYEES

John Ferrell has a long work record and professional tenure at Empire Electric. John was hired on June 9, 1980, and retired on August 25, 2017. During his time with the company, he worked in the following roles: apprentice lineman, journeyman lineman, working foreman, serviceman, system operator and chief system operator. Congratulations, John, on a well-deserved retirement and for devoting your entire career to provide Empire’s member-owners with safe and reliable electric service.

DAYLIGHT SAVING TIME

Don’t forget to fall back on November 5!
Set your clocks back by one hour.

Seal Hidden Leaks

They may seem small, but air leaks can cost a bundle on your heating bill and make it harder to keep your home comfortable. Sealing those leaks will help prevent wasting energy, improve comfort and have the added benefit of a strong barrier from noise, insects and moisture.
SAVE TIME. SAVE MONEY. SAVE PAPER.

Since 2013, EEA has offered a paperless billing option. If you haven’t already taken advantage of this program, now is the time to sign up. You will receive a $5 credit on your account if you register for paperless billing before December 31, 2017.

MY CO-OP ADVANTAGE

When you need to know ...

www.eea.coop is where you need to go!

Energy Experts Working for You

Winter Storm Tips

Maintaining warmth is a priority during a winter storm. Loss of body heat (or hypothermia) can be life threatening. Stay inside, dress warmly in layered clothing and close off unneeded rooms during a winter storm. To keep heat in, stuff towels and rags underneath doors and cover windows at night. When using an alternate heat source, follow operating instructions, use fire safeguards and be sure to properly ventilate.

When a Vehicle Crashes into a Utility Pole

Would you know what to do if your vehicle crashed into an electric utility pole? Knowing what to do could mean the difference between life and death. Visit http://bit.ly/2xoAlaB to watch a safety video on what to do in this situation.

No matter its size, electricity can kill. Be safe around electricity.
it and learned a lot.

Alex made the difficult decision to drop out of college and join the U.S. Navy in November 1950. He completed boot camp in San Diego and travelled to Anchorage on a transport in January 1951. From there he travelled to the Aleutian Islands, then to Japan and finally to Wonsan Harbor, North Korea.

When Alex arrived in North Korea, the front lines stabilized and negotiations started with the hope that an early truce could be arranged. But this would take two more frustrating years, while the opposing forces fought. The U.S. Navy provided extensive air and gunfire support, a constant amphibious threat and relentless minesweeping.

During the first two years of the Korean War, all U.S. naval ship losses and 70 percent of American casualties were directly related to mine warfare. The practice of safe minesweeping became essential. An elite special-purpose force, the U.S. Navy underground demolition teams (UDT) had the primary function of destroying enemy defensive mines prior to amphibious landings.

Alex was part of this elite team. He did not qualify as a UDT diver, but nonetheless was assigned hookman duties. This job entailed hooking mine disks that were tied off by the diving team. The disks were then transferred from the small wooden boat to a larger boat.

A few special days stand out in Alex’s memory of Wonsan. He recalls the day he turned 20 years old on June 27, 1951. He also recalls the day his boat was blown in half.

Early one morning before the day’s planned bombardment started, Alex and his team were conducting minesweeping duties. The boat exploded, throwing him high in the air. He hit the water so hard that it damaged his spine. Alex believes they struck a mine.

A buddy attempted to get Alex on land where six enemy tanks were strategically placed. As they scanned the area for safe entry, the North Koreans got out of their tanks and went into their caves. His buddy had a half-pound of C2 plastic explosives on his belt and placed a little under each tank barrel. The explosives pierced a hole through each barrel and disabled them.

The two men were spotted by a Navy lookout and evacuated by air to a hospital ship. Alex was in traction for three weeks. His spine healed, but the pressure of the impact left him unable to father a child.

Alex continued to serve until the end of the war. A formal treaty ending the Korean War was never signed, but a cease-fire has remained in effect since the Korean Armistice Agreement was signed on July 27, 1953.

Alex left the Navy to pursue his college dream; however, this didn’t happen as he was turned down for G.I. Bill funding because the government did not consider the Korean conflict a war. The G.I. Bill was later extended to Korean veterans in 1954 as a compromise under HR 7656 – P.L. 550.

All his brothers earned their college degrees after receiving financial assistance from the G.I. Bill. Ben served in World War II and Korea, and Johnny, Billy and Larry served during the Vietnam War.

Alex regrets not returning to college but remains proud of his service in clearing the mines at Wonsan Harbor. The North Korean minefields cost the U.S. Navy a great deal in lives, material losses and operational delays. Luckily, living veterans like Alex can tell the tale, and the lessons learned at Wonsan are still valid today.

Energy Efficiency

TIP OF THE MONTH

Spending more time in the kitchen during the holiday season? Here’s one way to be more energy efficient: Unplug small kitchen appliances, like toaster ovens and microwave ovens, when not in use. You could save $10 to $20 per year.