

Vietnam veteran finds peace digging into past civilizations

CORPUS CHRISTI (AP) — It's hard to imagine archeologist Herman Smith doing nothing.

His conversation is dotted with superlatives and an occasional enthusiastic curse. He juggles phone calls on different lines, shuffles through the drawers of his office, consults maps and gulps coffee — "This should keep me going for another 20 minutes," he quips.

It's hard to picture him at a crossroads. Quiet. Lost.

But the 50-year-old Smith recalls a time when he was just that, walking along a beach questioning his sanity.

He was in his early 30s and had recently resigned from the Marine Corps. He'd been an aviator with the rank of captain for eight years, including service in Vietnam.

He'd flown 322 combat missions and witnessed what he calls "a lot of senseless killing" and returned tired and confused.

Smith started over. He and his wife were divorced, and Smith sold his house, his houseboat and his sports car to help put himself and his ex-wife through school.

With help from the GI Bill, he enrolled at Texas A&I and started work on a bachelor's degree in sociology.

Some people feel awkward about going back to school, but Smith felt confident and less intimidated by the stresses of collegiate life.

He got a master's degree in anthropology from the University of Texas and a doctorate in anthropology from Southern Methodist Uni-

versity, and, in 1985, he was hired to be archeologist of the Corpus Christi Museum.

Since 1976, Smith has been field director at projects in La Paloma Creek in Duval County, Los Olmos Creek in Austin, Taylor's Bayou in Jefferson County and Baffin Bay in Kleberg County.

He's held adjunct professorships at Texas A&I and been principal investigator or co-investigator at sites at Ek Lumm, Chac Balaam and San Juan in Ambergris Cay, Belize; the McGloin House in San Patricio County; a 1554 Spanish shipwreck at Padre Island National Seashore; an archaic settlement on Greenwood Avenue; a Civil War torpedo raft recovery on Mustang Island and site near Oso Creek.

With neatly trimmed mustache and beard and a sun-reddened face, Smith could be cast as the academic version of Indiana Jones. He moves restlessly; and as he describes his most recent trip to Panama, it's clear he really hasn't come home yet.

A specialist in terrestrial archeology, he was invited to a site at the mouth of the Rio Belen, where, in 1503, Christopher Columbus and 80 settlers had built a trading post during Columbus' fourth voyage.

Smith explains that the explorer had sought refuge at the site during a February storm. The river is the only one on the Atlantic coast of Panama with a natural harbor, Smith said and Columbus had heard that the Indians there had gold.

The problem was that after the colonists landed, the river's water level went down, and the three ships couldn't get back over the bar to open sea.

"Columbus spent three months there," Smith said, "until finally they got a big rain."

The adventurers got back to their ships only to find them weathered and leaking. The Indians attacked and an eight-day battle ensued. The ships' crews were stranded in the Atlantic and had no longboats.

The group eventually headed for Spain but left behind a fort, a storehouse and, somewhere, the ship Galaga, which succumbed to wood-devouring worms, had sunk.

And almost 500 years later, archeologists are searching for ballast stones and iron with a magnetometer, which detects abnormalities in the magnetic field.

Any luck? "Well, six abnormalities — targets — were found," Smith said. "And any one of them could be the ship."

Smith's job was to excavate near a waterfall, high ground that fit Columbus' description of the settlement's location, for 16th-century Spanish objects. He straightforwardly admits that the search was a failure. He found nothing older than from the late 1700s.

But there's a spot where a landowner didn't want any digging done that Smith suspects might conceal remnants of the trading post.

If the Indians were hostile toward Columbus, the modern Panamanians weren't much less so toward the band of archeologists.

In Panama City, he and his colleagues were instructed not to leave the hotel, and in the jungle, they didn't wear white so they wouldn't be confused with forces opposed to the ruling government.

"They looked at us like we were Martians," Smith said. "I felt like I was in a zoo."

San Antonio school district gets second TEA warning

SAN ANTONIO (AP) — The Texas Education Agency has lowered the accreditation of the South San Antonio School District to "warned status" for the second time in four years.

A recent TEA report on the 11,000-student school system in conjunction with last week's move blames the divisive board of trustees for many of the district's problems.

"Examination shows that South San Antonio students are consistently below the performance levels of both the region and the state in academic achievement," the report said.

"There is no obvious reason for this other than the reality that the turbulent behavior of the board and accompanying machinations absorb so much of the creative energy of the district that it blunts the instructional program."

The "warned status" is just two steps away from revocation of accreditation, a move that would cut off \$32 million in state funds and force the district, known simply as South San, to close.

Education Commissioner William Kirby instructed his staff to begin preparing a briefing on South San's history for the State Board of Education should it become necessary to revoke the district's accreditation, the San Antonio Light reported Sunday.

When a TEA team attended a South San board meeting this summer, it expected to see trustees address the district's \$1.5 million budget shortfall, receive a report of the booster club's financial records, and review pending litigation against the district.

But, in a meeting marked by several heated arguments, the board did not address the budget and took little or no action on the remaining agenda items.

"The board president attempted to keep the meeting in focus and orderly," the TEA report said. "However, the disorder and chaos appeared to be status quo. . . ."

South San Superintendent Herbert Harper said classroom instruction has been unaffected by the board's turbulence. The district's biggest problem is money, he said.

Newly elected state district judge could preside over wife's work

HOUSTON (AP) — A little-noticed outcome of last week's election was that a new state district judge may have to pass judgment on his wife's work.

George H. Godwin, judge-elect for the 174th District, may be asked to preside over trials of juvenile defendants for whom his wife, a Harris County senior prosecutor, has sought to be certified for trial as adults.

Elizabeth Godwin is the chief of

the district attorney's juvenile division.

District Attorney John B. Holmes Jr. acknowledged that having a prosecutor married to a district judge is a novel situation for the county.

"There are 22 district courts and only 25 certifications a year here, so I don't see it as that much of a problem," Holmes said.

Godwin said he plans to disqualify himself in the event that a case in which his wife has a special interest

lands in his court.

"I'm sure I can arrange a swap," he said. "We can handle it."

Mrs. Godwin agreed, saying, "I can't imagine him being influenced by the fact that I'd filed a case."

The Godwins have been married about five years. Before that she was chief prosecutor in State District Judge Robert Lowry's court and Godwin was a second-in-command prosecutor in another court down the hall.

A104 Physical Education

My first time tutoring was a night to remember. My student was something called Bone Crusher Reed, a.k.a. Billy Jo, defensive tackle for the football team.

I had the shock of my life when he answered his dorm room door. He was about six foot seven...in diameter. And when he shook my hand, I thought I'd never get it back.

So there I was, face-to-knee with the big man on campus, wondering how I was going to relate American Literature to The Hulk.

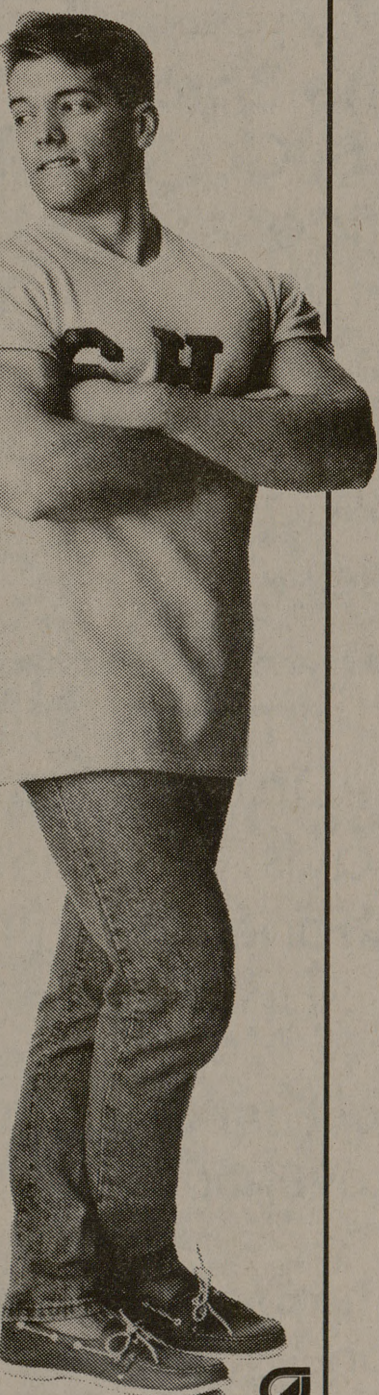
But then he pulled out a can of Orange Cappuccino. I was shocked! Could it be that this tough jock liked its delicate taste? And when Bone Crusher brought out the bone china, I was beyond belief.

Reading the expression on my face, he said, "What can I say? I like it. The Café Francais is pretty good, too." Well, who's going to argue, I thought. As we sipped our Orange Cappuccino, I discovered that Billy Jo loves reading novels; his only problem was poetry. So I gave him tips on reading Emily Dickinson, and he gave me a copy of Ann Beattie's "Falling in Place."

All I could think was, Dad's never going to believe this!



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Press One

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- No, I would rather just get my degree and get out of school.

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