



September 12, 2020

## America's oldest World War II veteran celebrates his 111th birthday



**(CNN)** — Looking on from his front porch in New Orleans, Lawrence Brooks probably never imagined he'd see this day.

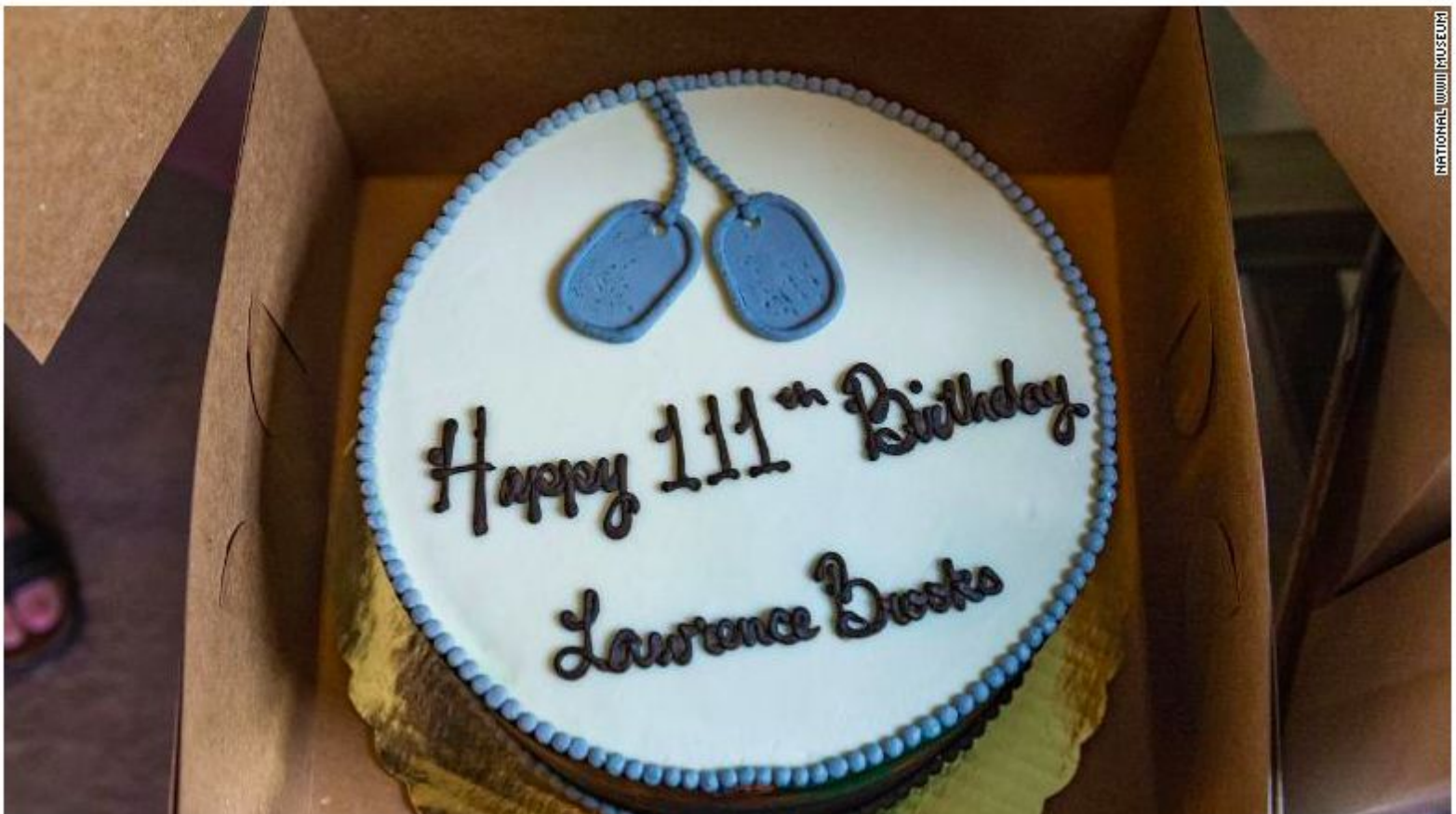
Today, the oldest known US veteran of World War II turned 111, and the National WWII Museum held a socially distant celebration for him.



The museum's Victory Belles sang some tunes during a military flyover.

The Victory Belles, the museum's vocal trio, sang several numbers for him while the Aeroshell Aerobatic Team and the Big Easy Wing performed a military flyover.

The museum has hosted Brooks's birthday celebrations on its campus for the past five years but had to adjust this year's celebration due to the Covid-19 pandemic.



As CNN previously [reported](#), the museum hosted a national card drive for Brooks in hopes of receiving 500 to 1,000 birthday cards. They got almost 10,000 cards.

"It is such an honor to have the oldest living US veteran of World War II living so close to our institution, and it was meaningful for us to continue to celebrate Lawrence Brooks and his incredible life in a safe manner this year," said Amber Mitchell, assistant director of public engagement in a news release.



Lawrence Brooks looks out from his front porch.

According to the museum, which is located in New Orleans, Brooks served in the predominantly African American 91st Engineer Battalion, which was stationed in New Guinea and then the Philippines during World War II.

Born in 1909, Brooks obtained the rank of Private 1st Class during the war, according to the museum.

In a 2014 [interview](#) with the museum, he recounted a terrifying brush with death when he was on board a C-47 cargo jet filled with barbed wire when one of the plane's motors went out. To lighten the load, he had to throw as much of the wire out as he could.

Brooks has five [children](#), five stepchildren, 12 grandchildren and 23 great grandchildren.



September 13, 2020

# Military flyovers greet oldest living American WWII veteran on 111th birthday

Lawrence Brooks served in the predominantly African-American 91st Engineer Battalion

The oldest known U.S. veteran of World War II observed [coronavirus](#) social distancing restrictions as he celebrated his 111th birthday in New Orleans.

The National WWII Museum arranged the socially distant birthday celebration for Lawrence Brooks Saturday at his home, [Fox 8 New Orleans](#) reports.

Brooks watched from his porch as the museum's vocal trio, The Victory Belles, sang "Happy Birthday" to him from outside his gate.



Lawrence Brooks celebrated his 111th birthday Saturday as the oldest living American World War II veteran (National WWII Museum)

He also enjoyed military plane flyovers conducted by the Aeroshell Aerobatic Team and The Big Easy Wing, according to the station.



Military flyovers greeted Lawrence Brooks on his 111th birthday in New Orleans. (National WWII Museum)

"It is such an honor to have the oldest living U.S. veteran of World War II living so close to our institution, and it was meaningful for us to continue to celebrate Lawrence Brooks and his incredible life in a safe manner this year," the museum's Amber Mitchell said, according to the station.

"As we continue to lose members of The Greatest Generation, it is so important that we honor these men and women for their bravery and sacrifice while they are with us," she said.

Brooks was born Sept. 12, 1909. He served in the predominantly African-American 91st Engineer Battalion, which was stationed in New Guinea and then the Philippines during World War II.

September 14, 2020

# Oldest living US veteran celebrates 111th birthday with special flyover



The oldest known living U.S. veteran of World War II celebrated his 111th birthday in style thanks to the National WWII Museum.

New Orleans native Lawrence Brooks served in the predominantly African-American 91st Engineer Battalion, which was stationed in New Guinea and then the Philippines during World War II. He turned 111 on Sept. 12.

The National WWII Museum has hosted birthday celebrations for Brooks on its campus for the past five years and didn't want this year to be any different. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the museum decided to organize a socially-distant birthday celebration.

Battalion, which was stationed in New Guinea and then the Philippines during World War II. He turned 111 on Sept. 12.

The National WWII Museum has hosted birthday celebrations for Brooks on its campus for the past five years and didn't want this year to be any different. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the museum decided to organize a socially-distant birthday celebration.





World War II veteran Lawrence Brooks was honored at his home with plane flyovers, a socially distant performance from the Museum's vocal trio, and nearly 10 thousand cards collected from well-wishers around the world.

“It is such an honor to have the oldest living U.S. veteran of World War II living so close to our institution, and it was meaningful for us to continue to celebrate Lawrence Brooks and his incredible life in a safe manner this year,” Amber Mitchell, assistant director of public engagement at The National WWII Museum, said in a press release.

The veteran and his family celebrated from their porch as the museum's vocal trio, The Victory Belles, performed and the Aeroshell Aerobatic Team and The Big Easy Wing demonstrated military plane flyovers.

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View Profile



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2,647 likes



Lawrence Brooks enjoyed military plane flyovers courtesy of the Aeroshell Aerobatic Team and The Big Easy Wing.



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39.3k followers

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766 likes



Add a comment...



Brooks was also given cake and close to 10,000 birthday cards that were collected as part of a national card drive, according to the museum.



Courtesy of The National WWII Museum

The National WWII Museum's vocal trio, The Victory Belles.

# INSIDER

September 5, 2020

## The oldest US World War II veteran is turning 111, and a museum is looking for people to send him birthday cards



Lawrence Brooks has celebrated five previous birthdays at the National World War II Museum. Courtesy of The National WWII Museum

- **Lawrence Brooks is the oldest-known US World War II veteran in the United States, and he's turning 111 on September 12.**
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- **Brooks served in the predominately Black 91st Engineer Battalion in New Guinea and the Phillipines during the war.**

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- **For the past five years, [The National World War II Museum](#) has held parties for Brooks, but due to the coronavirus pandemic, this year they are asking for birthday cards instead.**

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- **"He is such a wonderful man, and we are proud to be able to honor him again this year," a representative for the museum told Insider.**

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- **[Visit Insider's homepage for more stories.](#)**

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Lawrence Brooks is the oldest-known US World War II veteran alive today, and he turns 111 on September 12.

Brooks was drafted at age 31 to the US military's predominantly Black 91st Engineer Battalion during the war. He was stationed in New Guinea and the Philippines.

[He served](#) white officers during his time in the war and eventually achieved the rank of Private 1st Class.

Following his service, Brooks worked as a forklift operator until he retired more than 40 years ago.



**Brooks at the National World War II Museum in 2019 with his own military portrait.**

Courtesy of The National WWII Museum

For the past five years, the [National World War II Museum](#) in New Orleans has thrown parties for Brooks, who was raised in Norwood, Louisiana, and now lives in New Orleans.

The National World War II Museum told Insider of its role in helping to commemorate and celebrate the lives of veterans like Brooks.

"As we continue to lose members of The Greatest Generation over time, it's so important that we honor and celebrate these men and women and their sacrifice," a representative for the museum said.

Past parties have featured a variety of patriotic events, such as a serenade by the museum's vintage vocal trio, The Victory Belles.



**Brooks at his birthday party in 2019 with the Victory Belles.** Courtesy of The National WWII Museum

This year, however, the museum cannot host an in-person celebration for Brooks due to COVID-19-related health and safety regulations



Instead, the museum staff members are asking the public to send birthday cards to Brooks to help him celebrate his special day. On his birthday, museum staff will deliver the cards to Brooks' home, and The Victory Belles will wish him a musical happy birthday.

The National World War II Museum has enjoyed having Brooks nearby to help celebrate his special life moments.

"It's been wonderful to have Mr. Lawrence Brooks, the oldest living US veteran of World War II, living so close to our institution, and to be able to celebrate his incredible life every year," a representative for the museum told Insider.

People who wish to send cards to Brooks can do so using the following address:

The National WWII Museum

c/o Happy 111th Mr. Brooks!

945 Magazine Street

New Orleans, LA 70130



**enews** • Follow

**enews** Today we're raising our coffee cups to Lawrence Brooks, the oldest known US WWII veteran, who turned 111 over the weekend. ❤️ (📷: Courtesy of The National WWII Museum)

10w

**roseogutu.ro** 74y47uheduheysjeydhdydjdyfeiekur j4is 9w Reply

**madigana77** Happy Birthday and ...

Liked by ellenwplant and 73,540 others

SEPTEMBER 15

Add a comment... Post



**natgeo** • Follow

**natgeo** Photo by @robertclarkphoto The oldest living WWII veteran, Lawrence Brooks, is turning 111 today. Brooks served as a support worker in the predominantly Black 91st Engineer Battalion (U.S.), stationed in New Guinea and then the Philippines, and reaching the rank of private first class during the war.

Mr. Brooks is an amazing man for reasons other than his age: he endured a high level of racism not only in military service but also when he returned home, and as a 96-year-old during Katrina, he left his flooded home and swam to his church, climbed to the roof and was rescued by a helicopter.

Liked by justinwestagram and 510,213 others

SEPTEMBER 12

Add a comment... Post

**GMA Good Morning America** @GMA

The oldest known living U.S. veteran of World War II celebrated his 111th birthday in (socially-distanced) style, thanks to the National WWII Museum! 🎉

Oldest living US veteran celebrates his 111th birthday with flyover  
The National WWII Museum hosted a socially-distant birthday celebration for WWII Veteran Lawrence Brooks on his 111th birthday.  
goodmorningamerica.com

3:45 PM · Sep 14, 2020 · TweetDeck

33 Retweets 2 Quote Tweets 214 Likes

**NEW YORK DAILY NEWS** New York Daily News @NYDailyNews

Lawrence Brooks, the oldest American WWII veteran still breathing, is now 111 years old.

He served in the predominantly African American 91st Engineer Battalion and attained the rank of Private 1st Class.

Lawrence Brooks, America's oldest World War II veteran, turns 111  
The National WWII Museum organized a physically distanced birthday bash.  
nydailynews.com

9:45 PM · Sep 12, 2020 · SocialFlow

124 Retweets 6 Quote Tweets 384 Likes

**CNN** @CNN

The oldest known US veteran of World War II has turned 111 years old

America's oldest World War II veteran celebrates his 111th birthday  
Looking on from his front porch in New Orleans, Lawrence Brooks probably never imagined he'd see this day.  
cnn.com

9:00 AM · Sep 14, 2020 · SocialFlow

2.3K Retweets 204 Quote Tweets 16.3K Likes

**TikTok** @hannah.rachal

Mr. Lawrence Brooks is 111 years young and served in the Army

Today, we celebrated our nation's oldest WW2 veteran

**Norah O'Donnell** @NorahODonnell · Sep 11

Happy 111th birthday to Lawrence Brooks!

His secret to longevity? "Serve God and be nice to people."

0:05 | 2.2K views | So what's his secret?

4 30 97

September 12, 2020

## Lawrence Brooks, America's oldest World War II veteran, turns 111



Here's to you, Mr. Brooks. (The National WWII Museum)

Lawrence Brooks, the oldest American World War II veteran still living, turned a hearty 111 on Saturday.

The National WWII Museum, which is located in New Orleans near Brooks' home, organized a party in front of his porch around 10 a.m. The museum's vocal trio regaled Brooks with a singing of "Happy Birthday" and a military flyover streaked across the Louisiana sky.

Defense Secretary Mark Esper celebrated the bespectacled centenarian too. "I salute your service and your lifetime of determination," Esper tweeted.



**Dr. Mark T. Esper**   
@EsperDoD



Happy 111th birthday to our oldest living WW2 veteran, Lawrence Brooks. I salute your service and your lifetime of determination.



5:50 AM · Sep 12, 2020



 44.5K

 11.2K people are Tweeting about this

Almost 10,000 birthday cards poured in for Brooks as part of a national card drive, according to the National WWII Museum.

Brooks, who is Black and served in the predominantly African-American 91st Engineer Battalion, has said he takes pride in his service but carries complicated emotions about his time in the army.

“I was treated so much better in Australia than I was by my own white people,” Brooks [told](#) National Geographic. “I wondered about that.”



During the Second World War, he cooked and cleaned and shined shoes in the Pacific Theater, attaining the rank of Private 1st Class.

He is the father of 5 children; his wife, Leona, died in 2005.

Brooks offered simple life advice when he was 110.

“Serve God,” he told National Geographic, “and be nice to people.”

September 13, 2020

## America's Oldest World War II Veteran Celebrates His 111th Birthday in New Orleans

Lawrence Brooks served in the 91st Engineer Battalion during World War II



Lawrence Brooks, the oldest living World War II veteran in America, turned 111 on Saturday.

According to [CBS News](#) and [CNN](#), Lawrence rang in his milestone birthday with a socially-distanced celebration over the weekend outside the National WWII Museum, located in New Orleans near Brooks' home.

The museum's vocal trio, The Victory Belle, performed a rendition of "Happy Birthday" as the Aeroshell Aerobatic Team and the Big Easy Wing flew over the sky, CNN reported.

Brooks stood on his front porch and tipped his hat back as the planes flew above him. He also danced a two-step as The Victory Belles performed, according to [NOLA.com](#).

During the ceremony and subsequent car parade, Brooks, wearing a New Orleans face mask, smiled and waved to the crowd, saying, "God bless all of you. Every one of you."

According to CBS News, when Brooks was asked what his secret is for living long, he said "it's simple. Serve God and be nice to people."



A screenshot of a tweet from Norah O'Donnell (@NorahODonnell) on Twitter. The tweet text reads: "Happy 111th birthday to Lawrence Brooks! His secret to longevity? 'Serve God and be nice to people.'" Below the text is a video player showing a news anchor, Norah O'Donnell, in a pink blazer. The video has a play button icon in the center and a "MAJOR MILESTONE" graphic. The video player includes the text "CBS EVENING NEWS with NORAH O'DONNELL". The tweet is timestamped "6:55 PM · Sep 11, 2020" and shows "92" likes and "29 people are Tweeting about this".

Norah O'Donnell    
@NorahODonnell

Happy 111th birthday to Lawrence Brooks!

His secret to longevity? "Serve God and be nice to people."



6:55 PM · Sep 11, 2020 

 92  29 people are Tweeting about this



Prior to the celebration, the museum said on its [website](#) that well-wishers could send birthday cards to the museum, which would be delivered to Brooks' house.

In total, the museum received almost 10,000 birthday cards from all 50 states

According to the museum, Brooks served in the predominately African-American 91st Engineer Battalion, stationed in New Guinea and then the Philippines during WWII. He was a support worker for officers in his battalion, performing any task asked of him.

Brooks eventually attained the rank of Private 1st Class.



In May, Brooks spoke to the [National Geographic](#) about his time in the war. "I had some good times and I had some bad times. I just tried to put all the good ones and the bad ones together and tried to forget about all of them."

Brooks has five children, five stepchildren, 12 grandchildren, and 23 great-grandchildren. His wife Leona died in 2005 during Hurricane Katrina.

# Smithsonian

MAGAZINE

August 27, 2020

## Send a Birthday Greeting to the United States' Oldest Living WWII Veteran

The National World War II Museum is asking well-wishers to send cards to Lawrence Brooks, who turns 111 this September



Lawrence Brooks, 110, pictured at a previous birthday celebration at the National World War II Museum (Image courtesy of the National World War II Museum)

# W

hen Lawrence Brooks was a young soldier stationed in World War II's Pacific theater, he was assigned to a [C-47 plane](#) tasked with carrying a shipment of barbed wire from Australia to New Guinea. Suddenly, one of the plane's engines went out.

Panicking, he, the pilot and co-pilot lobbed loads of wire into the ocean in hopes of stabilizing the craft. Brooks remembers joking that if the pilot jumped, he'd grab onto him. After all, the plane was only equipped with two parachutes.

"It was a scary moment," he recounted in a [2015 oral history interview](#). "But we made it."

Brooks survived that close call. Now, the 110-year-old is believed to be the United States' oldest living World War II veteran. And in just over two weeks, on Saturday, September 12, he'll turn 111.

For the past five years, Brooks has [celebrated](#) his birthday at the [National World War II Museum](#) in his home city of New Orleans. This year, with partygoers unable to gather in person due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the museum is taking a different approach: namely, asking well-wishers to send the supercentenarian birthday cards via mail.



Brooks, pictured here in 1943, was drafted into the U.S. Army at age 31. (Courtesy of the National World War II Museum)

In 1940, 31-year-old Brooks was drafted into the U.S. Army's [91st Engineer Battalion](#). As Talia Lakritz reported for [Insider](#) last year, he was stationed mainly in New Guinea and the Philippines, working as a support worker and eventually achieving the rank of private first class.

[National Geographic](#)'s Chelsea Brasted notes that Brooks, who is black, served in a battalion predominately made up of African American soldiers. For a time, he even worked as a servant for three white officers.

During World War II, [black soldiers](#) faced discrimination both at home and abroad. A particularly egregious example of racism within the military was the preferential treatment afforded to German prisoners of war, who were allowed to dine in restaurants across the Deep South even as African American soldiers were forced to eat out of sight in the kitchens, writes Matthew Taub for [Time](#).

"We went to war with Hitler, the world's most horrible racist, and we did so with a segregated army because, despite guarantees of equal treatment, this was still Jim Crow America," [Robert Citino](#), a senior historian at the WWII Museum, tells [National Geographic](#). "African Americans were still subject to all kinds of limitations and discrimination based on the color of their skin."



Brooks' time in the Army drew to a close in 1945—a full three years before President Harry S. Truman officially [desegregated the U.S. military](#).

“I had some good times and I had some bad times,” Brooks tells *National Geographic*. “I just tried to put all the good ones and the bad ones together and tried to forget about all of them.”

After the war, Brooks worked as a forklift operator. He retired in his 70s and now lives with his daughter and caretaker, Vanessa Brooks, in the Central City neighborhood of New Orleans. He enjoys doting on his 5 children, 5 step-children, 13 grandchildren and more than 20 great-grandchildren, per Ryan Prior and Lauren M. Johnson of [CNN](#).

Brooks' wife, Leona, died in 2005 following the couple's evacuation by helicopter during Hurricane Katrina. The storm “took everything I owned, washed away everything,” he later [reflected](#).

According to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, just [389,292](#) of the 16 million Americans who served in World War II were still alive in September 2019. On average, 294 veterans die each day.

**Those who wish to send cards to Brooks can mail them to the address below.**

The National WWII Museum

c/o Happy 111th Mr. Brooks!

945 Magazine St.