



Faye H. Stewart

1915-2000

The son of a legendary woods boss, Faye Hills Stewart grew up steeped in the traditions of Pacific Northwest logging. He was identified for most of his life with the colorful Bohemia Lumber Company, in which his father had been an early partner.

In the years after World War II, the company came to Faye, his brother Loran Stewart and their brother-in-law Larry Chapman. Faye's role as Bohemia's woods boss and timber expert was the springboard for a remarkable life that combined technical innovation, forest industry leadership and quiet philanthropy.

Over more than six decades, Stewart distinguished himself as the consummate blend of the old ways of logging and the new. Crosscut saws and loggers' grit powered his industry when he first took to the woods, but he became a leader in the generation that transformed the technology of timber harvesting and brought the lessons of forestry into the field.

His was a working lifetime distinguished by resilience and innovation, and by success inside the world of logging and lumbering as well as outside of it. He pioneered new harvesting methods and generously supported forestry research. As the most private of philanthropists, he helped build institutions of lasting value in his community and his state, with particular generosity to Oregon State University and its school of forestry. Beyond all of that, with respect and curiosity for the earth and all its creatures, he reached outside the familiar arena of trees and forests to underwrite pioneering marine research that helped assure survival of the world's largest creatures.

Faye Stewart was born in 1915, in a logging camp shack with a tarpaper roof at Rujada, Oregon. His arrival was announced by the shriek of a logging locomotive's whistle, blown to summon his father from the distant hills. The father, LaSells Stewart, was a hard-charging and hard-living logging boss, a larger-than-life figure revered by his woods crews and the centerpiece of colorful stories that were told for generations in Oregon's southern Willamette Valley region. Faye's mother, Jessie Hills Stewart, was an independent and headstrong lumber camp wife who fostered in her children a sense of exploration and adventure. Faye preserved that outlook through a lifetime.

With gun, dog and horse, the boy ranged the Cascade Mountains. He was helping out around the company sawmill and firing steam donkey engines for logging crews before he was old enough to drive. By sixteen, he had worked as a blasting crew's powder monkey, turned in a summer on a lonely fire watch tower, and acquired a set of backwoods skills matched by few men in his rural community. Before he finished high school, he wore the badge of an Eagle Scout and was working as a guide and horse packer for the United States Coast and Geodetic Survey.

From Oregon's Cottage Grove High School, Faye headed to Oregon State Agricultural College to obtain a degree in logging engineering. After college, he joined the Bohemia Lumber Company. He worked under his father there, and also succeeded the senior Stewart as commander of Cottage Grove's National Guard unit. By 1940, the Guard unit had been mobilized in the buildup for World War II, and Faye was a full-time Army officer.

He was at Fort Stevens, Oregon, in June 1942 when the post was shelled by a Japanese submarine, the first time since the War of 1812 that a stateside U.S. military installation had come under enemy fire.

In 1944, using the many of the field engineering skills he learned in timber country, he succeeded where other men had failed and got artillery pieces onto the island of Saipan, despite heavy enemy resistance. He was awarded the Bronze Star, with a citation that said, "without regard for his own safety and under enemy mortar fire as well as danger from enemy snipers and enemy air action, he met obstacles and difficulties with resourcefulness . . ."

After the war, Stewart learned that his father and the one remaining partner in the Bohemia Lumber Company were ready to sell out and retire. With his brother and brother-in-law, he acquired the company. At the time, the operation was not much more than a run-down sawmill at Culp Creek, Oregon. With it came a questionable timber supply, a problem that became Faye's to resolve as he settled into position as Bohemia's vice president and director of timber operations.

He resolved that difficulty and a thousand others in his decades-long tenure at Bohemia. From Culp Creek, Faye became the stuff of legend in his industry. As colorful as his father before him, he was a steely ramrod of a boss, quick to anger and quick to laugh, occasionally inclined in his early years to settle matters with his fists. He was innovative, but nonetheless as traditional as a logger's double-bitted axe, and headline-making in a damn-the-torpedoes sort of way, but still an intensely private man.

The company that he helped shape in the second half of the Twentieth Century would grow to be Bohemia Inc., with 2,000 employees and operations ranging from British Columbia to central California. Even in its early postwar years, Bohemia displayed a penchant for innovation and diversification, traits that would become its hallmark over the years. Faye Stewart acquired a reputation as a timber innovator whose forest insights enabled him to maximize yields with a wide-ranging stewardship that artfully mixed the output of public and private lands.

Technical and management innovations were his forte. Over and over, he put Bohemia's woods operation at the forefront of change. He led his industry in a series of work rule and compensation changes that recast the traditional organization of Pacific Northwest logging and dramatically reduced log breakage and waste in wood operations. Under his leadership, Bohemia patented specialized forms of logging equipment. In countless instances—radio communications, use of aviation, forest road-building—his small company was often out in front of industry giants.

None of his accomplishments attracted more attention than the use of giant helium balloons to serve as "skyhooks" in pulling logs off steep slopes. Launched in 1961, Stewart's balloon logging program sprung from some of his military experience, which had involved work with remote-controlled aircraft. Over three decades of experiments, setbacks and successes, Stewart demonstrated that balloons were an ideal method for bringing logs off challenging and unstable slopes. He showed that the balloons could minimize environmental damage and eliminate the need for mid-slope road-building, which often produced devastating landslides.

Stewart and his balloon work drew the attention of the timber industry, government land agencies, the media, the U. S. military and Hollywood. The U.S. Navy used the balloons and Stewart's Bohemia logging crew in a series of ship-to-shore cargo handling experiments during the Vietnam War era. The movie industry

cranked out a fanciful film that had the logging balloons as key props.

Stewart left the Bohemia company in 1973, though he remained one of its directors and principal stockholders. He took the balloon operation with him and reorganized it into a company he called Flying Scotsman. Through the 1980s, the balloons continued to fly over logging operations in the U.S. and in British Columbia. Stewart, meanwhile, found a new sort of business success with Western Coating Inc., a company he built to market treated reinforcing steel for the construction industry.

Throughout Stewart's life, a hard-shelled exterior concealed the softest of hearts. The Stewart family and Bohemia were always listed in the first tier of those home-grown companies which willingly plowed money back into the public causes of their state and the communities where they operated. Organizations that served crippled and underprivileged children were frequent beneficiaries of Faye's generosity. When the needs of those organizations were especially great, his large roster of friends in business and industry could expect some gentle arm-twisting for the cause of the moment.

He was a member of the founding board of directors for the first hospital in his hometown of Cottage Grove, and he served on the foundation board for Sacred Heart Medical Center in Eugene, Oregon, the community where Bohemia's operations were headquartered in later years. He aided Oregon State University and its Department of Forestry in myriad ways, and was counted as one of the university's premier supporters. The forestry department's auditorium and the university's conference center are both named for the Stewart family. Much of his involvement with such causes as children and the advancement of forestry was quiet and anonymous. But its impact was so great that he was often heralded for his service, as in 1998 when he was presented the World Forestry Center's prestigious Harry A. Merlo Award and was also named as an honorary director on the center's board of directors.

Stewart nurtured a lifelong love of the sea, a passion manifested in a series of large, ocean-going motor yachts and the skills needed to operate them. This in turn led to an interest in pioneering Oregon State research of issues related to survival of whales, particularly great blue whales, the largest creatures on earth. Fascinated with the work of a university researcher who had become an acknowledged international expert on the blues, Stewart donated one of his boats to the program. The research, including pioneering work in the attachment of radio-tracking devices to the whales, subsequently produced information crucial to the survival of the blues. In his eighties, Faye Stewart participated in some of that research, working among the great whales in small rubber boats.

Moments such as that combined a spirit of adventure and a deep curiosity, the twin hallmarks of Faye Stewart's remarkable lifetime. To blend the roles of lumberman and citizen would have been enough in such a lifetime. But he did much more, seizing all that life had to offer, whether on the battlefield, the high seas or the rugged mountain slopes of the Pacific Northwest.