



## WWII Veteran Bell Changes History

Kristin Moriarty/Staff Reporter | kristinm@hhjnews.com | Saturday, March 5, 2016

On Feb. 16, Warner Robins Mayor (Randy Toms) declared that day as **Charles T. Bell Day**. Bell is a part of the **"Greatest Generation"** a World War II Army Veteran, and is also the last living litigant in the historic **Holmes v. Atlanta** Supreme Court case. He is 97 years old (young) and has been living in Warner Robins now for 30 years. Those who know him refer to him as **"living history."**

**"I was born on Sept. 9, 1918 in Atlanta Georgia,"** said Bell. **"I attended the local public schools, and grew up on the Southside of town. I grew up playing golf, attended college, served in the Army, and made real estate my professional career."**

In high school, as a way to earn some money – or as Bell refers to it as **"soda pop"** money – he would go to the municipal golf courses to caddy. The caddy master back then of Capital City Country Club lived in Bell's neighborhood.

**"My friends and I got to know him well, and he took real good care of us. So our parents gave us permission to work with him,"** said Bell. **"Back then we would earn up to \$2 an hour being a caddy. Being around the game, I started to learn more about it and fell in love with golf."**

After graduating high school, Bell attended Clark Atlanta University. His family was in the real estate business, and was going for a degree in business. Bell left college his second year to go work in his father's business because his father became ill.

Then in 1938, he acquired his first license as a real estate agent. **"Not long after, I joined the Army in 1941,"** said Bell. **"I served a total of three years in several places like Iran, France and Germany. My job was to deliver supplies across the borders, and my rank was corporal."**

When Bell returned home from the war, he got right back into real estate and the game of golf. However, back then African-Americans were limited to what courses they could play. Bell said the best course they played wasn't really a course.

**"It was land that was owned by a banker, and it was cemetery land,"** said Bell. **"The owner leased the land to a group of executives at the Atlanta Life Insurance Company, and they made it into a 9-hole course. Minorities had to use it, and it was a honey hole, which is a bar/night club."**

Bell said he and his friends helped make the course. The executives who leased it did not take care of it or keep up with the maintenance. Bell said they offered to water and keep it manicured, but the executives thought they wanted to take over the course.

**"That was not our intention at all,"** said Bell. **"We just wanted to make it nice. Well, while they were fussing over it, my friends and I just decided to go play at another course."**

Bell and friends **Alfred "Tup" Holmes, Oliver Holmes** and **Hamilton M. Holmes** then decided to take their chances to go play at the Bobby Jones Golf Course in northwest Atlanta.

**"We were immediately turned down,"** said Bell. **"The employee called us the 'n' word and said, 'You can't play here.' It was so common then to be called that that you never thought too much about it. So we just took it in stride and decided to file a lawsuit."**

Bell said the suit didn't take place until a couple of years later. It started out in the local courts and made it all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court. Finally, on **Nov. 15, 1955**, the court ruled in favor to desegregate public golf courses.

**"My friends and I were elated and excited,"** said Bell. **"Naturally, that next month we began to play golf, but we didn't go back to Bobby Jones. We went to the best of the best first, the North Fulton Golf Course. That is where the PGA tour players played before going to the Masters."**

Bell eventually went back to the Bobby Jones course, and there was no confrontation. All were civil. From there he said he continue to enjoy golf and the real estate business. Bell made his way down to Warner Robins in the 1980s because his second wife was the first female to be employed at the Mercer University School of Medicine.



L-R: Warner Robins, GA Mayor Randy Toms, Mr. Charles Bell and Michelle Smith



L-R: Michelle Smith, Greg Davis and Anita McGhee. Sitting: Mr. Charles Bell

This past November marked the 60th anniversary of the case.

Over time he has made many friends. **Michelle Smith**, attorney at law in Warner Robins, is one of Bell's best friends.

**"I cherish our friendship so much,"** said Smith. **"His story is so amazing. I always ask him what is his key to longevity, and he said doing what you love and having a rich circle of friends."**

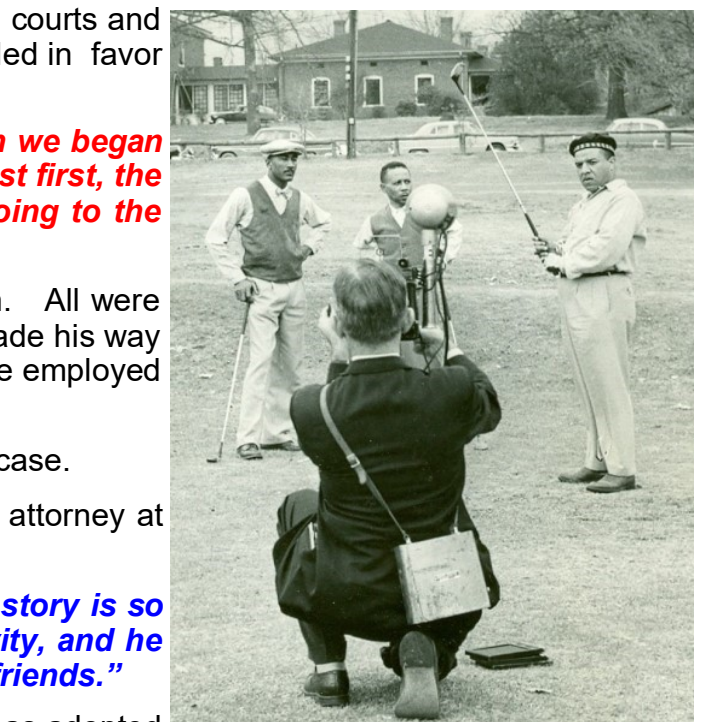
**Anita McGhee** is one of Bell's neighbors and said she has adopted him as a dad.

**"We've been neighbors for quite some time now, and when I got to know him he became my hero,"**

said McGhee.

**Greg Davis**, president of Houston County AARP Chapter 1952, is also another friend of Bell's.

**"Mr. Bell is one of our unsung heroes,"** said Davis. **"Think about the timeline of when he changed the course of history. In November, he and his friends won to desegregate golf in 1955, and one month later Rosa Parks took a stand and changed history. He is the greatest generation; he is living history. I am so grateful to be his friend."**



L-R: Charles Bell, Oliver Holmes and Alfred "Tup" Holmes. Location: North Fulton Golf Course

