

Roland “Joe” Savilla

U.S. Army, Colonel

1916 - 2005

Written by Cerinity Beverly and Mattie Flohr

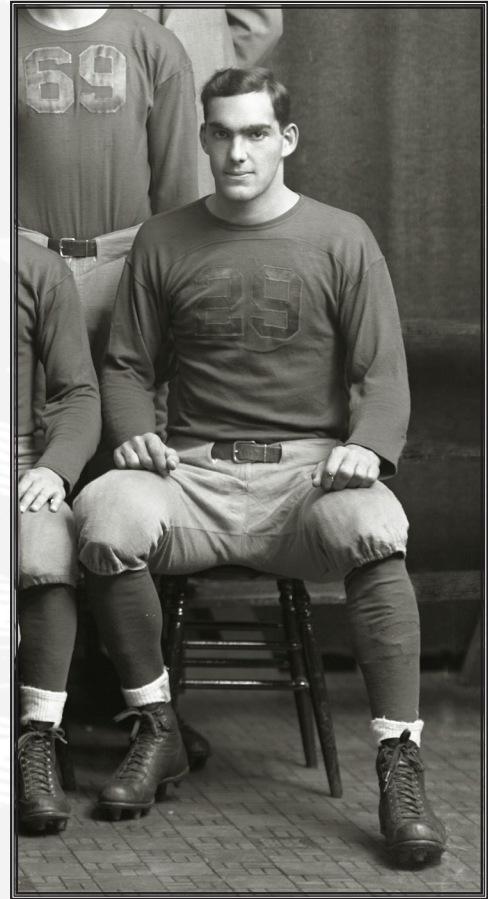
Instructed by Richard Zukowski

Roland “Joe” Savilla was born on May 13, 1916, in Livingston, West Virginia, but soon moved to Cabin Creek along the Kanawha River. His parents Marry Ann (Contenta) and Anthony Savilla cared for Joe, his five brothers and one sister. His father worked as a coal miner for the Wacomah Coal Company while his mother tended to the family.

Joe attended East Bank High School, where as a towering, six-foot-three teenager he played football from sophomore to senior year. This carried over when he attended the University of Michigan. There Joe earned a degree in history with a minor in social studies. He played as a tackle on Michigan’s football team and received Honorable Mention College All-American during his senior year. With his degree secured, he returned to West Virginia’s Kanawha Valley and gained employment at South Charleston High School as a teacher and as a coach.

While pursuing his teaching career, Savilla was drafted into the United States Army on June 28, 1941, and went through basic training at Camp Lee, Virginia. In January 1942, after the attack on Pearl Harbor, Savilla attended Officer Candidate School (OCS) and was commissioned as a second lieutenant. Now that the United States had joined World War II against Germany and Japan, he was sent overseas as a quartermaster assigned to the 14th Army Air Force.

The 14th was engaged in sending large amounts of supplies “over the hump” of the Himalayan Mountains to China. Chinese armies there under Chiang Kai-shek had been fighting since 1937 against a Japanese invasion. Allied leaders hoped to keep the Chinese military involved in the struggle, tying down enemy resources and tens of thousands of troops. However, Japanese forces had

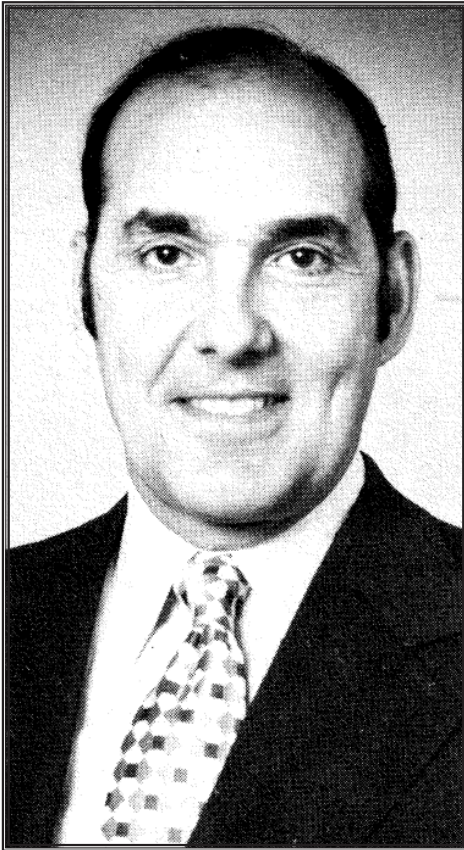


Joe Savilla was part of the 1939 University of Michigan football team. At six feet and three inches tall, Savilla made a superb tackle. Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan

Roland “Joe” Savilla

seized the overland routes between Allied supply depots in India and Chinese forces, which left air transport as the only viable alternative.

Savilla arrived in Bombay, India (present day Mumbai) before traveling west through Kolkata and arriving at the town of Ledo to join the 472nd Fuel and Truck Regiment. Working behind the front lines, Savilla helped organize thousands of Jeeps and trucks that ferried supplies, mostly bombs and gasoline, to planes waiting on the airfield.



Savilla when he was elected to the West Virginia State Senate. The Army veteran served on a wide variety of committees and was later appointed the state Director for Veterans Affairs. 1975 West Virginia Blue Book



Col. Savilla inspects food at the Fort Lee mess hall in 1962 as part of the 24th Quartermaster Group. Four years later, he deployed to Vietnam. *The Progress-Index*, 9 December 1962

Savilla stayed in India from 1943 until the end of the war, ensuring that supply lines remained open. Some of his experience is documented in an oral history interview preserved at West Virginia Archives and History.

After the end of World War II, Savilla did not return to his quiet life as a teacher. He remained in the military and transferred to the 11th Airborne Division in West Germany where he helped develop logistics strategies for U.S. forces in Europe. When the Nazi regime surrendered to the Allies in 1945, Europe quickly divided into the political blocs that defined the Cold War for the next several decades. The threat was ever present that open conflict would break out between western European nations and the eastern countries firmly under the control of the Soviet Union. Accordingly, the United States kept tens of thousands of troops stationed in Europe after World War II to support its allies.

Promoted to colonel, Savilla served in South Korea as a maintenance officer for an armored division during the Korean War and then briefly spent time in Vietnam overseeing logistics—where he managed helicopters instead of trucks. Sometimes he served stateside, such as in 1963 when he was appointed to command the quartermaster unit at Fort Lee, Virginia. Over the course

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of his career, Savilla was awarded the Bronze Star, Legion of Merit with two Oak Leaf Clusters, Master Parachutists, Army Certificate of Appreciation, and the Army Commendation Medal with three Oak Leaf Clusters. On August 18, 1971, after thirty years in the U.S. Army, Savilla retired at the rank of colonel and returned to West Virginia. He made a new home in St. Albans, Kanawha County.

Joe married Dorothy Roth Savilla on January 26, 1946, while in the military. In 1973 he married Betty Jo Martin of Glasgow, West Virginia. In total, Savilla had four children.

After his career in education and the Army, Savilla sought a career in politics. In 1973 he was elected into the West Virginia House of Delegates. A year later he was elected into the State Senate where he represented the 8th District (Kanawha County) from 1975 to 1978. He was active in Senate committees on Confirmation, Education, Finance, Public Institutions, and Transportation. In January 1979 the governor appointed Savilla as the Director of the West Virginia Department of Veterans Affairs, a post he filled until 1983.

On February 7, 2005, Roland Savilla passed away at the age of 88 at Thomas Hospital in South Charleston, West Virginia. After a lifetime of serving his nation and his state, it is fitting that he should be buried in the West Virginia National Cemetery in Pruntytown.



Asbestos-suited firefighters train at the Atlanta (Georgia) Army Depot in 1966, the year Colonel Savilla transferred from the senior quartermaster's post on the base to duty in Vietnam. *The Atlanta Constitution*, 10 October 1966

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Resting Place

West Virginia National Cemetery
42 Veterans Memorial Lane, Grafton, WV 26354
(304) 265-2044

Section 2
Site 565

Date of interment: February 11, 2005

About the West Virginia National Cemeteries Project

The West Virginia National Cemeteries Project is a program of the West Virginia Humanities Council, funded in part by the Veterans Legacy Program of the Department of Veteran Affairs and initiated in 2021. All biographies produced as part of this program are composed by West Virginia high school students, who conduct original research on veterans interred at the Grafton National Cemetery or the West Virginia National Cemetery, both of which are located in or near Grafton, Taylor County, West Virginia.

As home to one of the nation's earliest National Cemeteries, the community of Grafton has longstanding traditions of honoring America's veterans, including the longest continuously celebrated Memorial Day parade in the United States. The Grafton National Cemetery, located in the heart of the city and founded in 1867, is typically the endpoint of each year's parade. When the Grafton National Cemetery began to run short of space during the 1960s, the West Virginia National Cemetery was dedicated in 1987, just a few miles outside of Grafton in the community of Pruntytown. The same National Cemetery Administration staff cares for both facilities.

The West Virginia Humanities Council is proud to thank the following organizations for their participation in the West Virginia National Cemeteries Project: West Virginia Archives and History, the West Virginia University history department, Taylor County Historical and Genealogical Society, Taylor County Public Library, and Grafton High School.

Please refer comments or questions to the West Virginia Humanities Council
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