

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Center, Bill McGee, Montana, 1935

Bill McGee on leave, Honolulu, 1944

Wrangler Bill McGee at the Flying M E, 1948

Bill McGee, BMC (right) and John Edgerton, Jefferson-Pilot Communications, 1984

Military historian Bill McGee and wife Sandra (Photo Joanne A. Calitri)

Authors Sandra and Bill McGee (Photo Ingo Markmann)

Ballerina Alexandra Koneckova

William L. "Bill" McGee

Montana Years (1925-1941)

Bill McGee was born September 30, 1925 in Livingston, Montana. He grew up on ranches in Park and Phillips counties in Montana, and cowboeyed throughout the West.

Bluejacket Years (1942-1946)

In October 1942, at the age of seventeen, and like so many eager and patriotic youths, McGee enlisted in the regular Navy, agreeing to serve until he was twenty-one. These minority enlistments were called "Kid's Cruises." He attended boot camp in Farragut, Idaho; took gunnery training in San Diego, California; and was assigned to the Naval Armed Guard, the branch of the U.S. Navy that protected merchant marine ships and their valuable cargo and crews from enemy attacks and sabotage.

Between 18 March 1943 and 28 November 1945, McGee served in the Pacific Theater in three Liberty ships (*Nathaniel Currier*, *David Belasco* and *Thomas Nelson*) and one Victory ship (*Yugoslavia Victory*). He participated in the Pacific campaigns to take back the Solomon Islands, New Guinea, and the Marshall, Mariana and Philippine Islands. After the war, he served in the USS *Fall River* (CA-131) while she was the Target Fleet flagship for Operation CROSSROADS, the Bikini atomic bomb tests in the Marshall Islands.

On August 20, 1946, McGee was discharged from the Separation Center in Shoemaker, California, with the rank of Gunner's Mate Second Class. He earned medals for Asiatic Pacific Area Campaign (5 stars), American Area, Victory, and Philippine Liberation, and the Chief Bureau of Naval Personnel Commendation for Enemy Air Action off Guadalcanal on 16 June 1943.

Cowboyin' Years (1946-1950)

Following his discharge, McGee enrolled at Montana State College on the G. I. Bill with thoughts of becoming a veterinarian. However, wanderlust was still with him and, after a year, he left college to take a job as a horse wrangler in Yellowstone National Park. There he had a flare-up of the malaria he'd contracted in the South Pacific during the war. He

hitchhiked to Reno and checked into the new Veterans Hospital for treatment. Released from the hospital, he started looking for work. In summer of 1947, he hired on at Lake Tahoe as a trail and deer hunting guide. In fall of '47, a chance conversation at Reno's Round Up Bar (the unofficial hiring hall for cowboys) landed him the job of head dude wrangler on the Flying M E, an exclusive dude ranch twenty-one miles south of Reno that catered to wealthy divorce seekers, mostly Eastern socialites and Hollywood celebrities. To a young and good-looking cowboy, surrounded by so many wealthy and attractive women at the ranch, McGee thought he'd "died and gone to heaven."

First taste for Radio

In January 1949, during one of Reno's severest snow storms, McGee was helping a neighboring rancher round up his straying cattle. In the deep snow, McGee's horse somersaulted on him. McGee suffered a serious back injury and was ordered to recuperate in Reno where the doctor could check him daily. Several weeks later, wearing a back brace, McGee took a job driving for Star Taxi. An insurance company executive liked McGee's deep voice and asked him to audition for the company's commercials on Reno's KOH-AM radio. McGee was hired and became "John Friendly." He spun records, announced the births of new babies, and did the insurance company's commercials. After the show, "John Friendly" delivered free baby books to the new mothers.

When he returned to work on the Flying M E, McGee met many ranch guests who worked in the entertainment field, including the new medium of television. Most of them encouraged the young cowboy to try his luck in the new field. However, one successful radio actor/later TV director, commented, "Bill, why would you ever want to leave here? Most men would give their right arm to have your job!"

Fraternalizing with the ranch guests was frowned upon by the owner. However, when Joan Allison Borg arrived from the East for a divorce, things changed. Joan and Bill fell in love and were married in the spring of '49 in Fallon, NV.

Automobile Years (1950-1951)

In December 1949, realizing that being a dude wrangler wasn't the best job for a married man, Bill McGee left the Flying M E – and cowboyin' – with his new wife, Joan. They headed for Joan's hometown, Englewood, New Jersey. McGee got a job selling Rocket Engine Oldsmobiles and found he had a talent for sales. The McGee's first daughter, Lucy, was born in Englewood.

Restaurant Years (1952-1953)

The McGees returned to the West and settled in Marin County, California. The family grew with the births of Elizabeth ("Betsy"), William Allison ("Billy"), and Katherine. McGee owned and operated the popular Ranch House restaurant in San Anselmo, a short-term investment while he looked for something more permanent.

World Trade Years (1953-1957)

McGee entered the world trade business in San Francisco where he developed a new import division for Thomas D. Stevenson & Sons. Later, he founded Ferrostaal Pacific Corporation which he sold to his German partners in order to enter the broadcasting business, his targeted career choice since his Flying M E days.

Broadcasting Years (1957-1990)

In 1957, McGee made a successful transition into broadcasting, enjoying a 33-year career during which he held various sales and management positions:

Independent Television Corporation ("ITC"), Los Angeles, Calif., division manager, 1958-62;
NBC Radio, New York City, New York, spot sales representative, 1960;
Peters Griffin Woodward ("PGW"), San Francisco, Calif., branch manager, 1962-67;
KBHK-TV, Kaiser Broadcasting, San Francisco, Calif., general sales manager, 1967-69;
KEMO-TV, U.S. Communications, San Francisco, Calif., general sales manager, 1969-1970;
WATL-TV, U.S. Communications, Atlanta, GA, general manager, 1970-1971.

At ITC, he licensed syndicated television programming to advertisers and TV stations from coast-to-coast, selling programs such as "Lassie," "Fury," "Four Just Men," "Cannonball," "Danger Man," "Best of the Post," "Our Miss Brooks," and "My Little Margie."

He helped pioneer major-market UHF independent TV with Kaiser Broadcasting and U.S. Communications.

In 1971, McGee founded Broadcast Marketing Company (BMC) to provide affordable sales support and training services to radio and TV stations and, later, for cable systems. He was considered a leader and innovator in retail sales and co-op advertising.

In 1975, he created and produced the first nationally syndicated, monthly co-op advertising information service, Broadcast CO-OPPORTUNITIES.

In 1976, McGee pioneered the use of the film medium to sell radio advertising with "Get It On! Get It On Radio Now!!" The film was licensed in 137 markets within one year.

In 1976, McGee wrote his first of nine books on broadcast advertising, retail advertising, broadcast advertising sales, and the new electronic media:

- *A Marketing Approach to BUILDING STORE TRAFFIC With Broadcast Advertising*
- *Electronic Media Glossary*
- *A What, When and How Guide To Broadcast Co-op: The Untapped Goldmine*
- *A Primer on Broadcasting and the New Electronic Media*
- *The Professional's Guide to Consultant Selling*
- *1001 Creative Sales Ideas, Volumes 1 & 2*
- *Management Guide and Sales Training Manual*
- *The Definitive Guide to Broadcast Co-op: STILL The Untapped Goldmine*
- *Changes, Challenges and Opportunities in THE NEW ELECTRONIC MEDIA*

In 1980, McGee produced "How To Make Effective Low-Cost Television Commercials," the first retail advertising seminar video presentation specifically designed to show retailers how to be more comfortable with commercial production. Specifically, the presentation addresses the local advertiser's biggest concern: commercial copywriting and production. It is crammed with proven "how-to" information from the experts; includes brief excerpts from 50 award-winning retail commercials; demonstrates effective copy approaches, commercial formats, inexpensive production techniques; and, most important, how to maximize their television investments for increased store traffic, sales and profits. The presentation is available on DVD and video cassette.

In 1984, McGee signed an agreement with John Edgerton, vice-president, Jefferson-Pilot Communications, Charlotte, NC, for the sale of BMC's CO-OPPORTUNITIES service. McGee then "retired" for the first time to Incline Village, NV on Lake Tahoe.

During his broadcasting career, McGee received numerous awards and honors including PGW's "Television Colonel of 1964" and Broadcast Pioneer's "Pioneer Award" in 1982. In 1986, he was honored by the Builders of Broadcasting for "vision, dedication and achievement in the field of broadcasting." He is one of six charter members of the Cooperative Advertising Hall of Fame.

Military Historian Years (1990-present)

Since retiring from broadcasting in 1990, McGee has garnered critical reviews as a World War II military historian. Titles in print include:

- *Bluejacket Odyssey, 1942-1946* (1997, 2000)

Amphibious Operations in the South Pacific in WWII series:

- *The Amphibians Are Coming!, Volume I* (2000)
- *The Solomons Campaigns, 1942-1943, Volume II* (2002)
- *Pacific Express, Volume III* (estimated release date 2008/2009)

The *Library Journal* praised McGee for "...a thoroughgoing historical record and analysis that historians and scholars will find invaluable." The Marine Corps League declared, "Enough gripping drama, heroism, and heartbreak in McGee's almost encyclopedic 'The Solomons Campaigns' to supply Hollywood with material for a century."

Return to Cowboyin' Years (2001-present)

In 2004, McGee and his present wife, Sandra, celebrated the release of their co-authored book, *The DIVORCE SEEKERS - A Photo Memoir of a Nevada Dude Wrangler*. The book mixes Bill's personal stories from the Flying M E days with Nevada history and sidebars.

The Nevada Historical Society praised *The Divorce Seekers* as "the best book yet about Nevada's dude-divorce ranch business."

Bill and Sandra McGee have appeared on numerous radio and TV shows, guest lectured before various historical and military groups, and presented enrichment programs aboard cruise ships. They are currently working on the completion of *Pacific Express, Volume 3*, and a screenplay based on *The Divorce Seekers*.

Bill McGee is a member of Broadcast Legends and Western Writers of America.

Sandra McGee

Sandra McGee was born in Los Angeles, California. From the age of three, she seriously pursued studies in ballet and classical music (piano). She was singled out to be a protégé of Mlle. Zina Torchina, a former prima ballerina with the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo, and was called a "child genius" when she performed on stage at UCLA's Chopin Festival.

At the University of California, Berkeley, Sandra studied piano with the esteemed Bernhard Abramowitsch, performed with local chamber music groups, and earned the Bachelor of Arts

degree with a major in Music.

At the age of twenty-five, Sandra decided to abandon her pursuit of a performing arts career. An opportunity to refurbish and lease a 1906 office building in San Francisco's Financial District led to a career change to commercial real estate. Sandra designed, leased and managed office space both for a large corporation and later her own company, and found she had a talent for business.

After her father's unexpected death in 1983, Sandra and her mother visited a psychic in the Hollywood Hills. Sandra recalls the psychic telling her, "In your later years, you will be a writer." Not likely, thought Sandra, being as she didn't particularly enjoy research, writing, and sitting still for long periods of time.

In 1986, Sandra married Bill McGee and the psychic's prediction began to come true. At first, it was typing her husband's manuscripts, followed by carefully worded editing suggestions.

Then, in 1994, Sandra became a co-founder of the State Street Ballet, a professional ballet company based in Santa Barbara, CA. Her original writing began when she served as the Company's publicist. She also handled publicity for special events as a member of the Women's Auxiliary of the Music Academy of the West in Santa Barbara.

In 2001, Sandra became a full-time researcher and writer when she and Bill began their book, *The Divorce Seekers*. In addition to extensive research, Sandra wrote certain chapters that called for a woman's viewpoint.

Today, Sandra McGee serves as Marketing Director for BMC Publications. She still maintains her passion for the ballet and classical music, and is a supporter of the San Francisco Ballet.

