



## Chief Billy Follis

April 24, 1933 - October 14, 2022

“You must judge a man’s greatness by how much he will be missed.” – Will Rogers

On Friday, the Fourteenth day of October, Chief Bill G. Follis, 89, a resilient and eminent leader of the Modoc Nation peacefully walked on. The great-grandson of Long Jim, the youngest warrior in the Modoc War of 1872-1873, and Annie Jim, Bill descended from a family that has been integral to the government of the Modoc Nation following their removal to Indian Territory, present-day Oklahoma.

Born in Joplin, Missouri to Judd and Nita (Walker) Follis, Bill was a lifelong resident of Miami, Oklahoma. After graduating from Miami High School, where he lettered in football and basketball, he attended Northeastern Oklahoma A&M pursuing his education in animal husbandry and became an award winning rodeo cowboy. Bill also served as a naval aviator in the United States Navy. After his military obligation, he returned to Miami and met his wife of 65 years, Ms. Janet Bennett; they would move to Stillwater where Bill earned his Bachelor of Science degree in Animal Science. Returning to Miami, Bill and Jan raised their two sons, Billy and Phillip. His active support in his sons’ pursuits lead to their own accomplishments in school athletics and animal husbandry.

He worked at the Clear Creek Ranch in Welch, Oklahoma and helped to

develop the foundation breed of Brangus cattle. He would also go on to work as a loan officer for First National Bank in Miami. Developing his entrepreneurial skills, Bill purchased and operated a recycling business on the truck route in Miami. His other interests included ranching where he established his 4F brand that would later become the F1 Cattle Company. Along with Jan, and the boys, he worked to improve the market value and genetics of the Simmental and Limousin breeds. In addition to this, his experience as a cowboy served him well as he became an accomplished owner-trainer of racing Quarter Horses.

An extraordinary leader, Bill was a champion for the Modoc people. He began his tenure as Chief of the Tribe in 1972, and was instrumental in the restoration of Modoc Nation to federal recognition in 1978. He served as Chief for nearly 50 years - an incredible tenure of its own in modern tribal leadership. Through more than 12 consecutive terms in office, Chief Follis oversaw the growth of the Modoc Nation government and economy, where he established numerous support programs for the Modoc people.

In addition to his service as Chief, Bill was a pillar in the community of Miami and in the State of Oklahoma. He served on various boards, including the Oklahoma State University Foundation, Rogers State University, the Bureau of Indian Affairs Task Force under the Administrations of Presidents George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton, the Inter-Tribal Council of Northeastern Oklahoma, the Claremore Indian Hospital, the Northeastern Indian Tribal Health Clinic, and served as Chairman of the Oklahoma Commission on Indian Affairs. He worked with a nationwide collective of Tribal leaders, U.S. Presidents and Cabinet Members, Supreme Court Justices, State Governors, and countless elected officials at all levels. In recognition for his service, Oklahoma Governor Brad Henry issued the 2008 proclamation that September 25th was to be recognized as "Chief Bill G. Follis Day" in the State of Oklahoma. In further recognition, Bill received the 2016 Distinguished Alumni Award from the Oklahoma State Alumni Association and the American Indian Alumni Society.

Through working with local, state, federal, and tribal leaders, Bill negotiated a joint-compact to open the Stables Casino in 1997. This joint-compact was the first such agreement approved by the National Indian Gaming Commission and the Secretary of Interior. The Stables was not only unique in that it was the first joint-compact, but it was Miami's first casino and only off-track wagering casino in the area for many years. As Chief, he established several other economic ventures to benefit the Modoc Nation for generations to come.

Education, health initiatives, child and elder care, and housing support programs were at the forefront of his priorities and his accomplished benefits to the Modoc people. Bill's efforts as Chief have seen many first generation students and graduate students achieve great accomplishments academically and professionally. A common saying from his was "we will give you a hand up, but not a handout." This sentiment was expressed to convey his hope for recipients to continue working toward their own self sufficiency, so that others may have the same opportunity in the future. He also helped the Tribe reintroduce bison to the Modoc prairie.

He was a quiet man who could command attention with a simple glance or nod. He possessed equal parts strength and gentleness, wearing them not in layers, but blended like fine leather. His legacy will loom large in the pages of Modoc history, in the story of Indian Country, and in the Follis family. He will forever be remembered as a founding father and a hero to the Modoc people in the same breath as Captain Jack and Scarfaced Charley.

Outside of tribal and civic service, he was devoted husband, a father, a grandfather, and a great-grandfather. His greatest joys and pride were derived from his family. Bill's approachable nature and candid attitude helped him to develop a large contingency of social relationships and lifelong friends.

Bill was preceded in death by his paternal grandparents, George Follis and Elsie Brice, and his maternal grandparents Walter Walker and May Long; his parents Judd and Juanita Follis (Walker); his sister Judy Follis and her husband Jim Cobb; his brother, Phil Follis and his wife, Elizabeth Follis (DeMier); and his son William "Billy" Brian Follis; his nephews Michael Wooley, Donnie Grissom, and Dr. Brenton Bennett. He is survived by his wife of 65 years, Janet Follis; his youngest son, Phillip A. Follis; his granddaughter, Molly Ryan; his daughter-in-law, Sue Follis (Hill) wife of the late Billy Follis; his grandson Wm. Blake Follis and his wife Amber Follis (Artzer), and their two boys; his sister Karen Garvin (Follis) and her husband Gary; his brother-in-law Dr. Richard Bennett; his nephews, Brandon Bennett and his wife Wendy, Jon Wooley and his wife Barbara, Tod Wooley and his wife Rhonda, and Justin Garvin; and his niece Margann Bennett.

The Follis family would like to express its greatest appreciation to the leadership, staff, and employees of the Modoc Nation for their continued support; to those who have expressed their condolences, thoughts, and prayers; to the medical staff at Mercy hospital in Joplin who worked to care for Bill; and the Bill's cardiologist, Dr. De Hoyos, and his gastroenterologist Dr. Ancha.

A public service will be held at 2:00 p.m. on Saturday, October 29, 2022 at the Modoc Cemetery, South 679 Road, Wyandotte, Oklahoma 74370. The family requests that attendees respect the current health situation and be mindful to mitigate any spread or exposure. A larger event will be held at a later date to collectively celebrate the lives of Bill, Phil, and Judy. Services are in the care of Brown-Winters Funeral Home and Cremation Service in Miami.

To honor Bill's life and in lieu of flowers, donations may be made to the OSU Foundation – Billy Follis Memorial Scholarship. Checks may be mailed to: 400

South Monroe, Stillwater, Oklahoma 74074, or a donation noting the scholarship may be made online at [www.osugiving.com](http://www.osugiving.com).

Friends and family may send the family notes of encouragement by viewing Chief Follis' Tribute Page at [www.brown-winters.com](http://www.brown-winters.com).

# Cemetery Details

## Modoc Nation Cemetery

S 679 Road  
Wyandotte, OK 74370

# Previous Events

## Graveside Service

OCT **29**. 2:00 PM (CT)

Modoc Nation Cemetery  
S 679 Road  
Wyandotte, OK 74370

# Tribute Wall

JA

“ Janet, offering my sympathy after learning just last night about Bill's death.

Jeff Altmann - January 21, 2023 at 09:23 AM



“ Peaceful White Lilies Basket was purchased for the family of Chief Billy Follis.



October 27, 2022 at 07:28 PM

LF

“ Our sincerest condolences and prayers go out to Jan, Phil and the family. It was our pleasure and honor to work with Chief Follis. His service to the Modoc Nation and his love for his family was great.

Larry & Patricia Finch - October 26, 2022 at 11:54 AM

RC

“ Rogers Insurance Center purchased the Enduring Grace for the family of Chief Billy Follis.



Rogers Insurance Center - October 24, 2022 at 05:53 PM



“ *Serene Reflections Bouquet was purchased for the family of Chief Billy Follis.*



October 24, 2022 at 02:22 PM



“ *It was honor to know and work with Chief Follis. He always made sure to stop by our table when he saw my family having dinner at Stables restaurant.*

**William L. Fisher, Chief SC Nation, Ret** - October 20, 2022 at 06:37 PM



“ *Inter-Tribal Council, Inc Chiefs & Staff purchased the Simply Elegant Spathiphyllum for the family of Chief Billy Follis.*



**Inter-Tribal Council, Inc Chiefs & Staff** - October 20, 2022 at 09:52 AM



“ *Simply Elegant Spathiphyllum was purchased for the family of Chief Billy Follis.*



October 19, 2022 at 11:58 PM



“ Sentiments of Serenity Spray was purchased for the family of Chief Billy Follis.



October 19, 2022 at 05:52 PM



“ Chief Bill Follis was always proud and lived his life with Honor for his wife and sons.  
I could always count on a happy smile and greeting Of kindness. He loved his family and Tribe.He will sure BE MISSED BY MANY,sending JAN and little Phil prayers to help lighten their hearts .  
Sincerely Sherri Willis

**Sherri Willis** - October 17, 2022 at 12:16 PM



*Thank you Bill*

**Steven Rhodes** - October 19, 2022 at 09:32 PM



*Prayers from the Howe Family, Bill WILL be missed...*

**Donnie Howe** - October 20, 2022 at 06:23 PM



“ *Bill was a great man, thoughts and prayers to the family.*

**Cheryl j Tallman** - October 17, 2022 at 09:37 AM

LG

“ Prayers for the family. Lots of memories with the Chief including a lot of burgers at Montgomery 's Lunch. I'll miss you Bill.

Larry Glenn - October 17, 2022 at 08:30 AM



“ Hoot and Jan



Jan Buck - October 16, 2022 at 08:05 PM



Thoughts and prayers are with Billy's family

Jan Buck - October 16, 2022 at 08:08 PM

KP

Sorry for the families loss he will be sadly missed he was a friend to all.

Woody & Karen Painter

Karen Painter - October 17, 2022 at 10:03 AM

CS

Jan & Little Phil - so many memories of our families on Monkey Island. Miss them all. So sorry for your loss and prayers for peace. Cathy McGhee Spencer

Cathy Spencer - October 17, 2022 at 02:28 PM

JG

Phil - I am so sorry for your loss. Prayers for you and your mom.

Jeannie (Kelly) Gleaves - Class of 77

Jeannie Gleaves - October 19, 2022 at 09:39 AM