



The man who squeezed money out of rock, Dallas E. Wells, stands by a display fronting Highway 66, at Hooker, Missouri.

## THE STONE MAN OF HOOKER, MISSOURI

BY E. N. TOOPS

*This article first appeared in the September 1947 issue of Veterans Magazine.*

You can get money out of a rock if you have the will to try hard enough. That's what Dallas E. Wells figured, and he had seven months in hospitals recovering from wounds received in the "Belgium Bulge" to plan it out.

Dallas, a BAR [*Browning Automatic Rifle*] man in the 83rd Div. 329 Infantry, began to look forward to the day of his discharge with plans on what he could do to bring home the bacon to his family. He had a piece of land that fronted on U. S. Highway 66 and was part Ozark mountain, a mechanical mind, and a pretty wife to encourage him. With that kind of start, he reasoned, what more could he want?

While he was in hospitals those seven months he tried to decide whether to go back to work for the other fellow or go into some kind of business for himself. Self employment won. After army life, being his own boss seemed a needed change.

What kind of business he would go into was still hazy in his mind. He spent a lot of time day-dreaming. One day he thought of a skill his father had taught him; the art of stone cutting. He had it. Why not sell building-stone which would be in demand because of the lumber shortage? He had a mountain of it and his ground alongside the highway would be his store. He toyed with this idea a while, then his business sense won out. He would have to create a market first and his highway frontage was a natural for a service station and garage. He had some mechanical experience. He would put in a garage and service station which would start the cash coming in almost at once. With that important detail assured he could get out stone and get his market established in that.

Upon his discharge in November of 1945 he started to work on the first of his plans. On December the 2nd of that same year he had completed a cement block garage, and installed pumps for a service station. Then he began to look over

the mountain in the rear of his place. The station, meanwhile, was bringing in some cash along with a gradually growing garage business.

The mountain had plenty of rock ledges. In his spare time he split large boulders into flat stones, the cut sides bringing out the beautiful shades of the stone. He built a crude road down the mountain to his station. He bought a truck to haul the rock down from the top. He stood each rock on its edge in nicely arranged piles at the sides of his driveway facing the highway. This was the extent of his advertising that he was in the stone business.

Local people passing and seeing the nice display of rock, asked him if it was for sale, and bought it from him by the hundred square feet. Tourists passing, stopped and asked about it. He began to receive orders from as far away as Indiana and Ohio for his stone.

With his garage business assuming the proportions of a going concern, this flood of rock orders caused him to think of help. His brother, Sterling, was an excellent mechanic so he took him into partnership with him. This gave him someone to work in the garage and station and to help keep the work caught up there, so he could split stones. The arrangement merely eased the situation for a short time. He began

to hire extra help to clear the earth from over the ledges, to load and unload the truck and finally the cutting, with Dallas supervising the quality of the split.

Last year he had to turn down hundreds of orders for he is limited in the amount of rock he can get out by the steepness of the mountain and the mud when it rains. This spring Dallas and his brother, Sterling, plan on having a bulldozer work the earth off the ledges and intend building a better road to get the stone down the mountain. Also they plan on getting more trucks to haul their out-of-state orders to the railroad where the stone is loaded onto flat cars for shipment to the east. Most of the local buyers pay for it as it is stacked along the highway, doing their own trucking.

One man can split and get out about four squares a day. At the F. O. B price of eight dollars per square that's thirty-two dollars a day which isn't hay.

Dallas sorts his rock according to shades of color ranging from a milky-white to a deep red. Prospective home builders need but to point out each pile of the shade and shape they want. The rocks are stood on edge in such a way that their shapes and shads are easily seen. Dallas prefers rock of an average thickness of two to three inches after split-



Y'gotta eat Wheaties for this job. Dallas Wells' brother, Sterling, holds split stone from their quarry. Big job to get 'em down the mountain.



The garage and filling station of the veteran Wells Brothers, Hooker, Mo., which kept them eating until their stone business hit paydirt.

ting, as the ideal laying width, and cuts his stone to that thickness. The shapes are graded so that very little trimming is necessary in laying up the building walls.

He has an ideal way of measuring the rock. When a truck backs up to a pile to load, the loaders fit the

rocks together in a flat layer over the truck bed filling the holes between the larger pieces with smaller ones. Dallas then measures the sides and goes back to whatever he is doing. When the truck is ready to leave it is driven by the station and Dallas counts the layers. The average two

and a half ton truck can haul three squares and some haul four. The truckers delivering at so much a square according to distance.

Cut on a three inch thickness, the rock is fairly heavy, and the buyer, since he pays by the square and not by the pound, gets the odds on the thicker rock. Sometimes a builder splits them again getting two for one if he wishes to use a thinner rock. Dallas doesn't like thin veneer, but sturdy construction of the three inch width with plenty of cement back-fill.

"A house built like that," he said, "will last forever."

Some builders here build a four inch clay tile wall for insulation and lay the rock up with a back-fill of cement making a finished wall thickness of ten to twelve inches. The interior is plastered.

Giving added beauty to the finished building is the practice of putting a beading on the mortar lines in a contrasting color such as black

which makes each rock stand out from its neighbor, and the rock mason varies the shade of the rocks adjoining. This practice produces such a wide variety of shapes and color that several rock houses side-by-side would look entirely different.

Dallas is Post Commander Pulaski County Memorial Post No. 4238 Veterans of Foreign Wars, and is busy now with plans for securing a new home for the Post. End.

Both Dallas Wells, the subject of this article, and Ely Toops, the author, were veterans of World War II. Both were also determined to be self employed. Dallas left the garage business to Sterling. It eventually became Sterling's Hillbilly Store. Dallas had an upholstery shop, laundry business, and Western Store, among other ventures. Ely had a radio and novelty store. His wife, Minnie Lula, had a souvenir shop on Route 66 in Buckhorn from 1947 until it was bypassed in 1956 (see *Old Settlers Gazette*, 2007).

# BALES

GENERAL CONTRACTORS

---

**Celebrating 81 Years**  
Since 1939

---

1901 Historic 66 W · Waynesville, MO 65583

**(573) 774-2003**  
Fax (573) 774-6163

---

2601 N. LeCompte Road · Springfield, MO 65803

**(417) 865-5800**  
Fax (417) 865-4418



## ASSISTANCE ASSOCIATION

### MISSOURI VETERANS CEMETERY

*To render compassionate support to veterans and their families associated with the Missouri Veterans Cemetery at Fort Leonard Wood and to enhance the overall appearance and operation of the Cemetery.*

If you are interested in the work of the Association, call **573-774-3496** and ask that an Association board member contact you.