



PRESS RELEASE

CITY OF VANCEBURG

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Re: The Military Heroes Banner Project Reaches 200 Banners

From: Brenda S. Bear, City of Vanceburg

The vision began back in 2022 when the Traveling Vietnam Wall made a visit to Vanceburg. Former resident and Cold War Veteran, Howard McCann helped organize the banners which included 14 Lewis County Veterans who were killed in action in the Vietnam War. This was no easy task. Howard researched each Veteran for their military records, he contacted the family members and went to great lengths to find each soldier's photograph. No one realized how large this project would become a year and half later.

Early in 2023, Howard approached Vanceburg Mayor, Dane Blankenship about adding to the 14 banners. He wanted to include all military servicemen and women and all wars, not just Vietnam. Howard once again took on the mission of contacting Veterans and their families.

If you sit down with Howard, he will share stories with you about his own experiences and those of his family members. He and his wife, Barbara have dozens of banners now hanging of fathers, brothers, sisters, and cousins. One such story is regarding Barb's father, Fred

Stafford. Fred served from 1941 to 1945. He was in World War II and one of four Lewis County Pearl Harbor Survivors. He spent four years in the South Pacific and returned home to Vanceburg on the train. Barb says when her father got off the train, he was so thankful to be home, he bent over to kiss the ground. His banner now hangs beside the Vanceburg Train Depot.

The banner hanging next to Fred Stafford is his brother, Harry Edward Stafford. Harry served in the U.S. Navy. In 1945, his ship, the USS Bush was hit and subsequently sunk by three Japanese kamikazes. Harry survived in the water for several days and managed to make it back home to Vanceburg.

Howard will also tell you the story of his friend, "Kirkie". Denise Kirk Ash is a lawyer who currently lives in Lexington, KY. She has several banners of her relatives in downtown Vanceburg. Benjamin Garrett Kirkendall, who was her Great Grandfather and a POW in the Civil War, Elza Augustus Kirkendall, served in WWI, was her Grandfather; Calvin Boggs Kirkendall, served in WWII and was Kirkie's Uncle; David Allen Ash, was in the Spanish American War, her Great Grandfather and Hansel Adrian Ash, who served in Korea, and was her Father. Kirkie's family was lined with patriotic servicemen who gave back to their country.

Mayor Blankenship has paid respect to his own family members who have served. His uncle, William Bonner, a brother Thomas Michael Blankenship and his aunt and uncle, Laoma, and Camby Parker. His wife, Deborah's father, Clyde Eugene Garrett is hanging beside the Veteran's Park with the above family members.

The Veteran's Memorial Park was built and dedicated in 1996. It is located on the corner of Front and Main Streets. The idea for the park stemmed from Ben Pugh, a former President, and CEO of Citizens Deposit Bank. He recommended the bank donate the land, plus a gift of \$100,000, which was given to the City to build the park. The Veteran's Park is also a memorial to Ben Pugh's father, Benjamin Thomas Pugh, who was a Lieutenant Commander and fighter pilot in the U.S. Navy from 1940 to 1951. He served in World War II and was killed in action in Korea in 1951.

Of the 200 banners now hanging in the City of Vanceburg, they represent 19 wars or conflicts, 4 Pearl Harbor Survivors, 2 Civil War Veterans, 1 Spanish American War Veteran, 3 Veterans who served in 3 different wars, 3 Veterans who were Prisoners of War, 14 Veterans who were killed in action during the Vietnam War, 2 Veterans who were killed in action during World War II and 1 Veteran who was killed in action in Korea. In addition, we have Veterans ranked from Private E1 to General.

The City of Vanceburg receives calls every week from Veterans and/or family members asking questions about the banners. Mayor Blankenship said we have Veterans whose family members live as far away as California and Texas. He is proud of the attention the banners have gotten from the locals, from Veterans and their families, and from the media.

The Vanceburg Police Department has three active police officers who are Veterans: Tom Flannigan, Chan Evans, and Zach Mustard and one City employee, Laddie Biles. A former City Mayor who served, Bill Tom Cooper and Denver Moore served on City Council for 22 years. All 6 banners are hanging in front of the City Building.

The Military Heroes Banner Project developed because of a great team of people. Howard McCann, Mayor Blankenship, and the City employees have worked tirelessly to ensure its success. We are thrilled to reach our goal of 200 banners, BUT we plan to keep going as long as the families continue to call.

Mayor Blankenship plans to have a walking map with each Veteran's location listed. The map will be available at the City Building or online. Follow us on Facebook for updates.

The banners will be taken down during the winter months and back up in the Spring. If you would like to know more information, call the City of Vanceburg at 606-796-3044.