

Veterans Day

NOVEMBER 11, 2021

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‘I carry that scar to this day’

Patton's right-hand man honored; Solway Vet Memorial Dedication

By Alan Sloan

Military value kept one World War II combat veteran from enjoying what would have been a warm welcome home after being wounded.

However, the appreciation shown for a Vietnam combat veteran's military value, upon coming home following his first tour of duty, was anything but warm.

Cecil Haun and Patton

So valued as a scout for famed Gen. George Patton, U.S. Army Master Sgt. Cecil Henry Haun, now 103 years young, wasn't allowed to be sent back to the United States for treatment and recovery from combat head injuries.

"He got hurt three different times," said his son, Ronald Haun, a former U.S. Air Force Airman 1st Class. "One of the times they had just shot the pack off his back with a 50-caliber machine gun. He dove under a tank, and about the time he dove under the tank, it fired.

"He woke up in a Stuttgart (Germany) hospital with blood coming out of his ears," the son added. "... It busted

both of his eardrums — but Patton still wouldn't let him come home.

"He was like, 'not that one, I need him too bad,'" Ronald recalled his father quoting the famed general.

Such were the stories Mr. Haun has told, as father and son were alongside

Cecil's wife of 74 years, Mary Martha Haun, 93, as the couple received a standing ovation during Solway Veterans Memorial Dedication Ceremony.

Held among scores of distinguished and decorated Knox area veterans, Gold Star mothers (lost sons in combat) and about a dozen local political dignitaries, the ceremony for this new Memorial near the Knox-Anderson County line along Pellissippi Parkway came on a cool Thursday morning, Sept. 30.

"He was rough as a cob. He was something else," said Mr. Haun, who served more than two years in the European theater, in describing Patton after the ceremony.

Donald said his father "was less than 30 yards behind" the famed four-star general when Patton "was blown out of his Jeep. He said his driver had run over a land mine."

Polis and Vietnam

The Rev. Dr. Pat Polis, a former U.S. Army captain who served three tours of duty in Vietnam, told the gathering a combat story while serving as ceremony emcee.

Flying in to serve his first tour in Vietnam in 1968, Polis said, "When I landed I was processed in and went to a base camp, waiting for a helicopter to pick me up and take me to my unit.

"I was there only two hours when I was hit with mortars," he added. "I had no weapon and I was still in khakis ... and I crawled under a bench and thought I was going to die. I was 21 years old.

"I carry that scar until this day."

Returning home after his first tour of duty, "When I got off the airplane I got spit on," said Polis, also president of Captain Bill Robinson Chapter 1078, Vietnam Veterans of America. "I was called 'baby killer' and 'murderer' and other words I can't even repeat."

Fighting back tears at this point, Polis said in reference to the new Memorial, "I hope you understand and hope you know how much this means to all of us. We didn't do it for nothing.

"We have the greatest country on earth despite all the problems and difficulties," he

"This (Memorial) means a lot to me. We've got freedom, freedom, freedom."

~ U.S. Army Master Sgt. Cecil Haun



added. "This is proof of that. "We are the Land of the Free because of the Brave, and that's what this Memorial shouts loud and clear.

"I want to thank everyone who has given so much to make this happen today."

During his opening remarks, Polis said, "It is our sincere hope that those who traverse Oak Ridge Highway from Knoxville to Oak Ridge, that stretch of highway known as 'Veterans Memorial Mile,' will see the Memorial, and it will evoke memories of those who served. And we hope many of them will stop and reflect on what these service members did to preserve our freedom."

Ben Atchley Home Vets

Also recognized were eight military veterans on hand from Ben Atchley State Veterans Home in Karns. Among them was Durward B. Swanson, "one of the last surviving service members that was at Pearl Harbor," Polis said.

Laying of Wreaths

Laying of Wreaths featured veterans representing each U.S. military branch: Retired Sgt. Gary Henderson, Army; Retired Sgt. Maj. Tom Humphries, Marines; Petty Officer 3rd Class Mike Rutherford, Navy; Retired Maj. Gen. Robert Perat, age 95, Air Force; and Journalist 3rd Class Mike Steely, Coast Guard.

During his address to the gathering, Humphries, Knox County Veterans Services officer, praised those veterans "who served before me."

"... I sincerely believe without your dedication to the country, I would never have gotten the opportunity to serve," he added.

Gold Star Mothers Sherrie McGhee of Farragut (son, Cpl. Ryan C. McGhee, died in Iraq May 13, 2009), and Lynn Forehand (son, Staff Sgt. Ryan Haupt, died in Iraq Sept. 17, 2006), with husband, Jay Forehand, joined the Wreath Laying ceremony.

Also recognized were Gold Star Mothers Karen Ray and Patricia Lawrence.

Other recognitions

McGhee also was presented a special Gold Star flag honoring her late son by Retired Air Force Brig. Gen. Jim Mungenast.

TVA Retirees Association "led this ... as one of our voluntary projects," said Jo Anne Lavender, TVARA Knoxville Chapter president, about building the Memorial.

Among the many people, businesses and organizations she thanked for their construction contributions, Solway Baptist Church, which sits adjacent to SVM, "dedicated and donated this land for the Memorial and is going to keep it up over the years," she added. "Pastor Logan (Parton of SBC), we thank you and your congregation for the extreme contribution that they made."

Karns High School Air Force Junior ROTC, under the direction of Retired Air Force Lt. Col. Chuck O'Donnell, assisted during the ceremony.

Chuck Sayne presented Playing of Taps; Kelly Shiye played a Bagpipe Tribute titled "Amazing Grace."

Final thought

"This (Memorial) means a lot to me. We've got freedom, freedom, freedom," Mr Haun said.



Patton near Brolo, Sicily, in 1943. Wikipedia

Left: As the senior honoree among distinguished and decorated veterans at Solway Veterans Memorial Dedication Ceremony, former U.S. Army Master Sgt. Cecil Henry Haun (seated), age 103, recognizes the standing ovation from ceremony attendees he and wife, Mary Martha Haun, 93 (to Mr. Haun's left), received Thursday morning, Sept. 30.



Photos by Alan Sloan

Top/Above photos: Veterans from the Ben Atchley State Veterans Home in Karns were recognized for their service and sacrifice during Solway Veterans Memorial Dedication Ceremony Thursday, Sept. 30.



Gold Star Mother Sherrie McGhee of Farragut was presented a special Gold Star flag honoring her late military son — Cpl. Ryan C. McGhee, who died in Iraq May 13, 2009 — by Retired Air Force Brig. Gen. Jim Mungenast, right. Also part of this ceremony was the Rev. Dr. Pat Polis, a former U.S. Army captain who served three tours of duty in Vietnam. Polis, event emcee, also serves as president of Captain Bill Robinson Chapter 1078, Vietnam Veterans of America.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SERVICE

A huge ‘Thank you for your service’ message from Hayes

By Alan Sloan

Having recognized the service of law enforcement with the use of billboard space he purchased in the Knox County area around September 2020 — known as “Dear Officer Billboards” to answer critics “giving police a hard time” — prominent Farragut business owner David Hayes made the next logical step in honoring those willing to lay down their lives in the heat of battle.

He placed a “DEAR VETERAN, Thank you for your service” message, which prominently features a U.S. Flag in the middle, on a billboard along Kingston Pike near Paterson’s Home Appliances and Grassy Valley Baptist Church.

Grateful for being “very, very blessed” as owner of David’s Abbey Carpet & Floors for almost a half century (10853 Kingston Pike in Farragut and also in Pigeon Forge), Hayes added, “My goal with the veterans is to let them know how much I appreciate their service, because I could not be doing what I do if it wasn’t for folks like them.

“I think it’s something people take lightly a lot of times, when our people have spent their lives — spending years — in the service. They just need to be thanked. Without them, what else could we do? Would we have the freedoms we’ve got?”

Recognizing “Nov. 11 is Veterans Day, I thought,



‘when would be a better time to put a veterans’ billboard up?’” Hayes said. “So I put a veterans’ billboard up. It went up about the third weekend in October.

“It’ll be up the whole month of November,” he added, noting his plan to make this an annual display in roughly the same time frame.

Concerning positive feedback on the veterans billboard, “I’ve had some from

the people at church (he’s a member of Grassy Valley Baptist),” Hayes said.

Vet billboard motivation

Motivated to honor veterans this way based on the positive feedback of the law enforcement support billboards, “I had some help with the first four or five, people contributed, and I just took it from there and kept going,” he said. Rotating the use of 18 to 20

billboards in the Knox metro area in 30-day intervals “during the last year” until mid-October, “the most I had up at one time is five,” Hayes said. “I put them in Jefferson City, I put them in Pigeon Forge, New Market ... we put one on the Interstate where everyone could see it. ... In Lenoir City, and several in Knoxville.”

Hayes said the law enforcement billboards should reappear next spring.

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