



TALES OF

VALOR



A special Veterans Day supplement to the Advance Monticellonian

From Monticello to the Middle East: Kerry Hartness shares his story of service and growth

By **JEFF McDONALD**
 editor@monticellonews.net

Whenever we started talking about this publication we knew that the focus had to be honoring our local veterans. One such veteran is Kerry Hartness. He was kind enough to be interviewed for this first-ever edition of Tales of Valor.

Hartness is a Monticello native who joined the Arkansas Army National Guard in 1999 and served until 2007. He was part of the 3-153rd unit based out of Warren where he held the rank of Specialist. Hartness was deployed twice during his years of service. From 2001-2002 he was deployed to the Sinai Peninsula in Egypt to support Operation Enduring Freedom. His second deployment was from 2003-2004 when he went to Taji, Iraq to support Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Hartness said that to his knowledge, he is the first member of his family to join the military.

"I had just started college at the time I joined," Hartness said. "I had some friends who had already joined the Guard who in-

fluenced me. They saw it as a way to pay for school. Between my friends and an opportunity to help fund my education, I was motivated to enlist."

While Hartness may not have had family members who served before him, he has had family members who have followed in his footsteps. His stepbrother has served active duty in the Army, and his brother-in-law is currently deployed to the Middle East with the Army.

When asked if he thought that he learned any skills, training, or life lessons during his service, Hartness gave a poignant response.

"Absolutely," Hartness stated. "At the time, it was just something that I was doing, and didn't give it much thought because we were in a time of relative peace. I thought I could go to drill once a month and do a couple of weeks each summer. Do my time, be done, and help fund my education. I never thought that over the next five years, I would be deployed twice."

"Looking back, I was at a time in my life when I needed direction and guidance," Hartness added. "It was not until later in life

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Photo courtesy of Kerry Hartness

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HARTNESS

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and after some reflection, that I can appreciate some of those lessons that I still carry with me today. I was not a perfect soldier and I still have personal struggles, but my time helped to shape me to be who I am today.”

Some of the skills Hartness listed are: adapting to changing situations, self-discipline, how to effectively collaborate as part of a team, paying attention to details, and problem-solving skills.

“It’s easy to get caught in the day-to-day grind,” Hartness stated. “With personal reflection, it helps to not overlook what matters and to not take the small stuff for granted.”

“I would tell anyone who is considering joining the military the same thing that I told my stepbrother and brother-in-law before they joined. The military is not like any other job. It isn’t for everybody. You will get out of it what you put into it. The selfless service of all military personnel is admirable. For the right person, a career in the military can provide personal stability and satisfaction you can’t find in any other job while learning valuable skills that can be translated into everyday life. There is no greater job on Earth than to serve others,” Hartness said.

The staff of the Advance says Thank you for your sacrifice and service to Kerry Hartness and all of the veterans of Drew County and veterans across our great nation, and around the world.

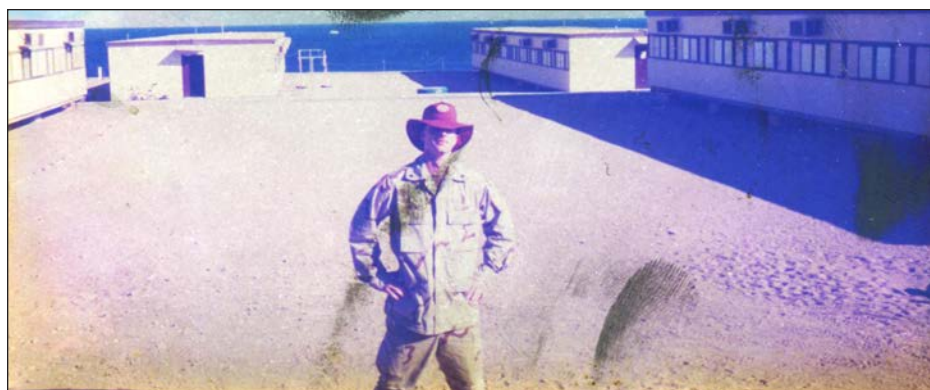


Photo courtesy of Kerry Hartness

A life of service: LeAnne Burch’s military journey and community leadership

By JOANNA POOLE
reporter@theeagle Democrat.com

No one can argue with the fact that being a part of the United States military is one of the most selfless acts that an individual can perform. The choice to serve your country and be a part of something larger than yourself speaks volumes. It takes a certain type of person to make the decision knowing that they may one day give their life to protect the ones they care about and even those they’ve never met.

LeAnne Burch’s life has been a remarkable journey of service. With a 12-year career in the U.S. Army followed by years in the reserves, Burch is a testament to how military service shapes not just a person’s career but their outlook on life. From her time in the Judge Advocate General (J.A.G.) Corps to her role as a civilian lawyer and community leader, Burch has been a steady advocate for both structure

and service.

When asked if the military influenced who she is today, Burch doesn’t hesitate.

“Certainly,” said Burch. “The military was a good fit for me because I like the idea of structure and knowing what expectations there are, and being able to see results that I feel are positive in whatever way—in the world or locally or in public opinion.”

LeAnne’s path to military service wasn’t planned. She joined after her husband enlisted, initially following his interest in military training. What she discovered was that the Army offered her much more than just a career—it gave her a broader understanding of leadership, politics, and the impact of public service. As a J.A.G. officer, her experiences were beyond “boots on the ground”; she gained insights into how military operations in-

See **BURCH** Page 6

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Pictured left to right: Jackie Curry – US Army National Guard; John Wood – US Army Reserves; Ardeneal Moore – US Navy; Richard Tucker – US Army; Norman Word – US Army National Guard; Terry Nolan – US Army National Guard. Not pictured: Eugene Bickford – US Marine Corp; Charles Howe – US Army.

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Jackie Curry – US Army
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BURCH

Continued from Page 2

intersect with global politics and law.

“I understood structure and system and roles in a different way because of my military service,” explained Burch. “As I moved up in ranks, particularly in the reserves, I learned how to run organizations as a business—budgets, training. A lot of that kind of influence was not a kind of “boots on the ground, I’m learning to shoot my weapon” kind of thing as much as seeing the bigger picture of organization as I advanced in the military.”

After her active duty, Burch transitioned to civilian practice and eventually worked with the Department of Human Services for another 12 years. Her work in public service continued, driven by the skills she learned in the military. Today, she serves on the board of Vera Lloyd, a nonprofit that works with vulnerable youth.

“I have been blessed with knowing so many wonderful people in my life that I’m in a position to see how people can work together for volunteer opportunities,” said Burch.

Her military experience also shaped her approach to community leadership. With a fish fry event coming up to benefit Vera

Lloyd, Burch highlights the importance of community support.

“The kids that are a part of Vera Lloyd are in our local school systems. They are a part of our community while they are here. It’s important to be welcoming and loving,” said Burch.

Being good stewards of both the community’s resources and the young lives that Vera Lloyd supports is part of her focus.

“It’s important to me that we are good stewards of the community assets and the people that donate to the program also see the results from that,” explained Burch.

Reflecting on her military service, Burch gave her thoughts on encouraging others to consider joining.

“Our military needs to reflect all of America,” said Burch. “It needs to reflect the best of America. If you think that you can offer the best that you can be, the military is a wonderful place. The experiences in everything from dealing with people to taking advice to having a mentor relationship where you can grow personally and professionally are wonderful.”

Burch emphasizes that the military not only teaches discipline and leadership but prepares people for the changing workforce.

“Due to artificial intelligence, the work-

force of tomorrow is going to be so dependent on additional skills, and if you have served in the military, you have learned how to work with people, how to grow in whatever area you are in,” said Burch.

When she talked about her family, LeAnne’s pride in their values was clear. Her son followed in her footsteps, joining the military.

“I want my kids to have a servant’s heart,” said Burch. “I want them to believe that they need to make the world better. Protecting America is such a noble cause. If you encourage your kids to do something bigger and more noble, I think that’s being a great parent.”

Her dedication to service, both in the military and in her community, is rooted in her belief that hard work and encouragement make a difference.

“In the military, you see the difference between hard work and encouragement versus beating someone down and hurting them,” explained Burch. “The benefits and the growth of the military outweigh the potential danger, in my opinion.”

LeAnne Burch’s story is one of a life built on service, leadership, and a commitment to making the world better. She leads by example, always encouraging those around her to strive for something greater. And for her, the military has been a defining force in that journey.

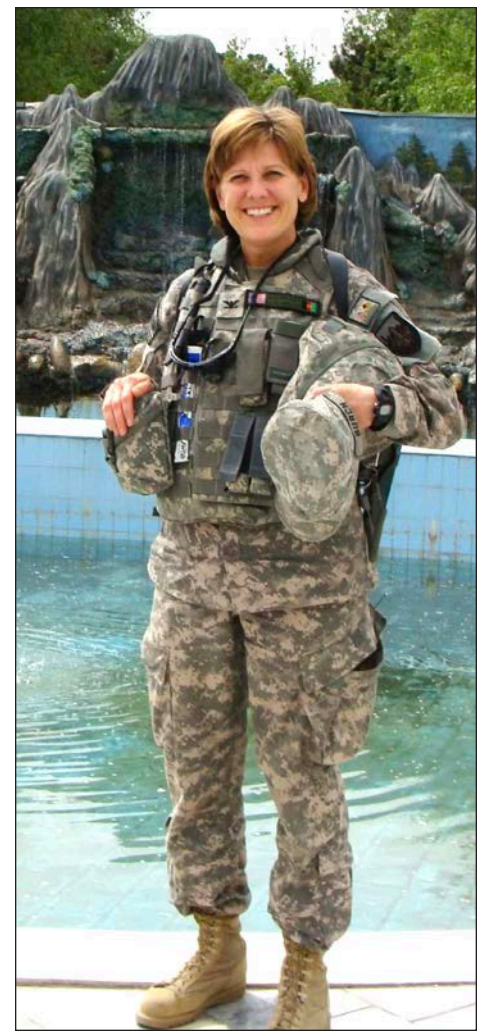


Photo courtesy of LeAnne Burch

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Peter G. Simpson,
United States Army
Infantry, Vietnam War

Sara M. Hartness,
Army Signal Corp.
Heidelberg, Germany

Kerry Steven Hartness,
Administration, NATO
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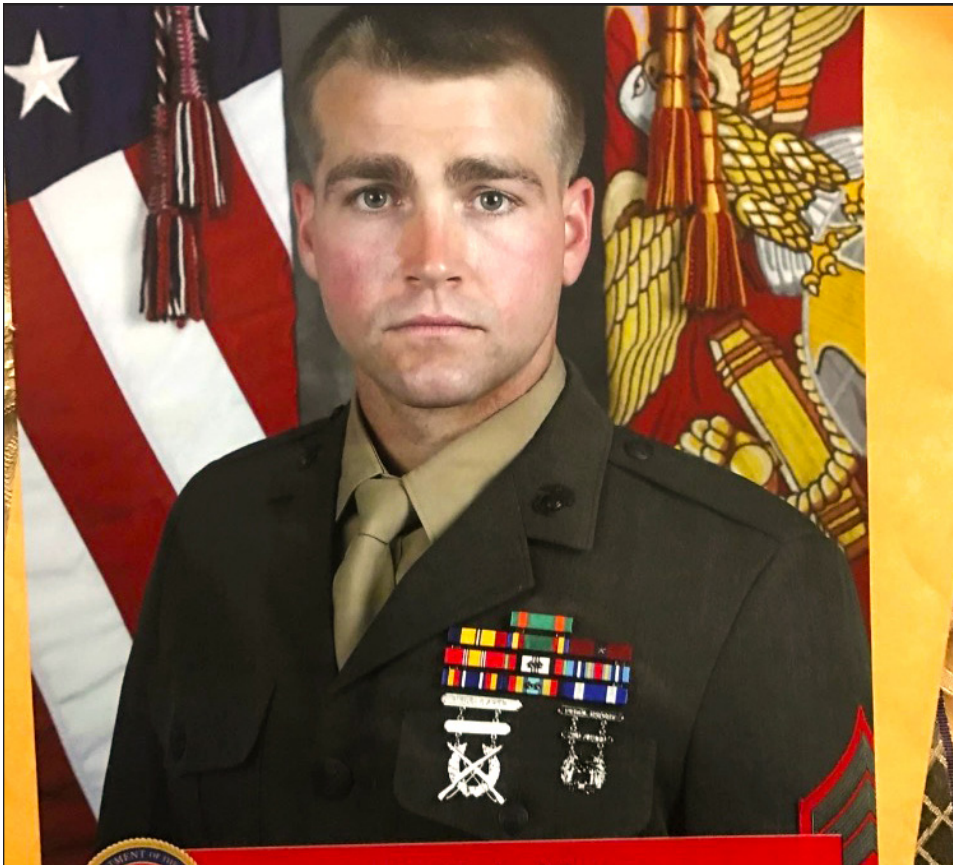
Gary Booker - USMC



Joe Meeks - Army

A graphic for Veterans Day. On the left, a portion of the American flag is visible, showing the stars and stripes. The background is a dark, textured surface resembling weathered wood. The text "VETERANS DAY" is written in a large, white, serif font, underlined. Below it, "★★★ HONORING ALL WHO SERVED ★★★" is written in a smaller, white, serif font. At the bottom, "RYBURN" is written in a large, white, serif font, underlined, with "— MOTOR COMPANY —" written below it in a smaller, white, serif font.

More Veteran photos submitted by Drew County's own



Sergeant D.L. Moore -USMC



Keith Moore - USMC - 2 tours in Vietnam, 123 Combat Missions, and 6 Air Medals

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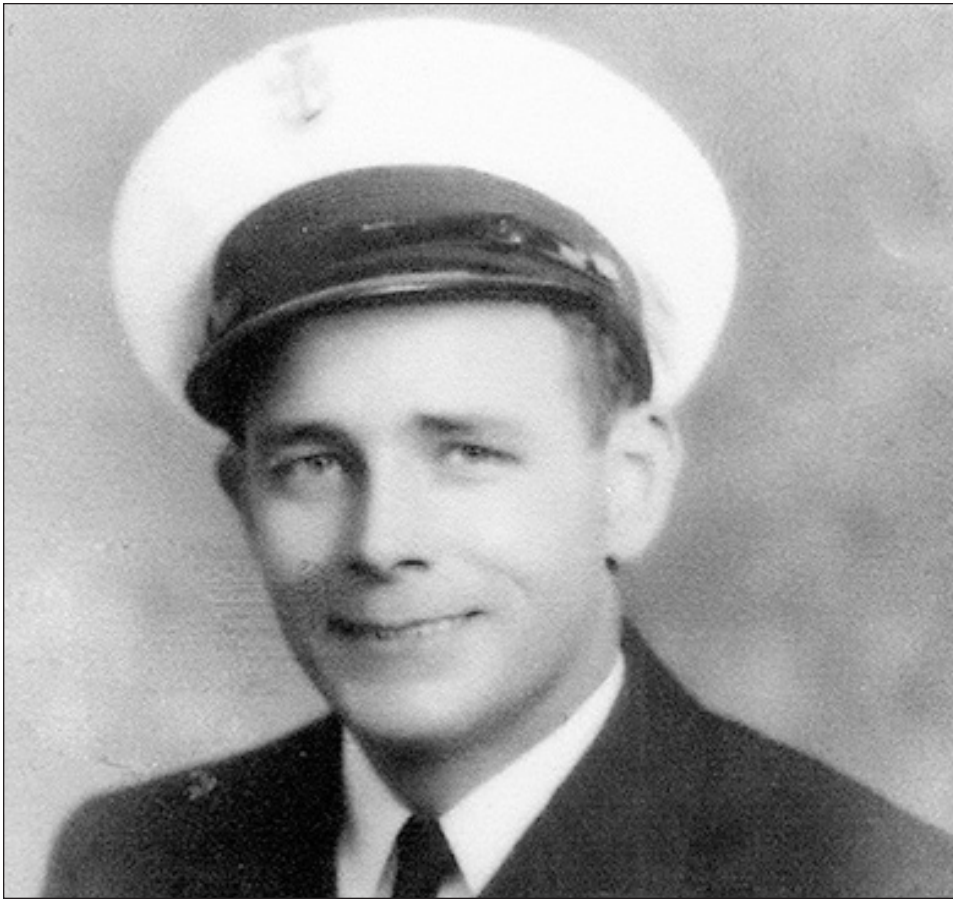
  

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Woodrow William Watts - Navy



Top: Claude A. Watts - Air Force; Larry E. Watts - USMC; Bottom: Joseph Watts - Army; Claude Watts, Jr. - Air Force

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Echoes of Valor: The unforgettable tales of two heroes from World War II and the Korean War

By **JEFF McDONALD**
editor@monticellonews.net

Sometimes when writing a piece for a special publication, such as Tales of Valor, it can be hard to come up with ideas that you feel your audience will be able to engage with. Sometimes you have too many ideas and have to make tough decisions on which ones make the cut. I wanted to write something from an older veteran's point of view, but I wasn't sure where to begin. It was at this point that fate smiled upon me and my phone rang. Monticello native Rex Borchardt was on the line asking if he could come to talk to me about his uncle and brother-in-law who had served in World War II and the Korean War respectively. I couldn't resist such an opportunity. My interview with Borchardt recounting these tales is as follows:

Borchardt's Uncle, Marshall W. Tippy served in the United States Navy during WWII. During his service, he held the rank of Radio Technician Third Class (RT3c).

Tippy first served on the USS West Virginia in the Leyte Gulf. Prior to her time in the Leyte Gulf, the West Virginia was hit by sev-

eral torpedoes and bombs during the attack on Pearl Harbor. After extensive repairs, the battleship made her way to the Pacific.

Tippy recalled that while in Leyte Gulf, the Navy knew that the Japanese Fleet was approaching Surigao Strait and that they were lying in wait for them. On battleships like the West Virginia, shots had to be fired while the ship was sideways so that the recoil could be managed and no damage done to the ships. Tippy said that the West Virginia had just completed a pass when the Japanese forces entered the strait. Tippy recalled everything lining up perfectly and the West Virginia opened fire, sinking an unknown number of Japanese vessels.

This was a catastrophic defeat for the Japanese Navy. The defeat crippled their Navy and marked a turning point in the war. Due to this victory, the Allies were able to secure the Philippines.

The Battle of Leyte Gulf was the largest naval conflict in history at the time. It is still considered one of the largest naval battles in history and is deemed one of the most crucial

See **TALES** Page 13



Courtesy photo

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Richard Griffin*

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TALES

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moments in the Pacific Theater.

Following his time on the USS West Virginia, Tippy served on the USS Saratoga, an aircraft carrier commissioned in 1927. Tippy recalled a story where one day, a single Kamikaze made it past the anti-aircraft gunners. The plane hit the deck of the Saratoga, skipped over the side, and blew up in the water. Tippy said that as the plane was coming in, everyone aboard held their breath, and when no one was harmed there was an audible exhale that could be heard all over the ship.

After the war, Tippy returned to Monticello for a while, but he ended up settling in Albuquerque, N.M. He bought a plane and learned to fly. During a planned visit to Monticello, Tippy lost his life in a tragic plane crash.

Borchardt also recalled tales from his brother-in-law, Johnny Durham who served with the Army during the Korean War.

Durham and his soldiers were involved in the Battle of Chosin Reservoir. During the battle, U.S. forces began advancing and drove the North Koreans near the border of China. At this time, the Chinese stepped in hoping to stall the U.S. forces from advancing and protect their border.



See TALES Page 14

Courtesy photo

TALES

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Both sides faced crippling winter weather during the conflict. Extreme winter conditions had moved into the area, and temperatures were recorded as low as negative 35 degrees Fahrenheit. These temperatures caused U.S. forces to be unable to use their firearms as the mechanisms were frozen.

Another issue, this one only affecting the U.S. Troops, was that between the Army and Marines fighting this conflict there were only 30,000 troops. The Chinese forces boasted a number of nearly 120,000. Durham said that they knew that they were in trouble and had no choice but to retreat.

During the retreat, Durham and another soldier were captured by Chinese forces. Durham recalled being led to a road and seeing U.S. trucks that were filled with wounded soldiers being set on fire.

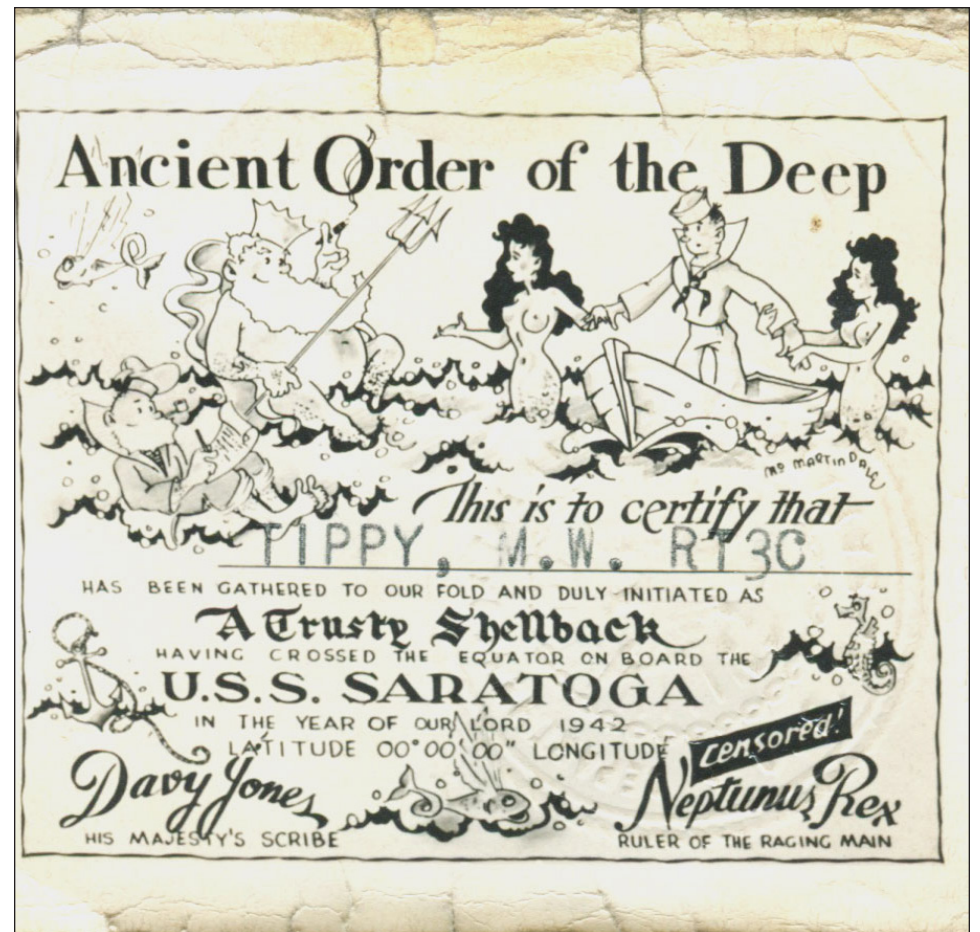
"My God! They are going to kill us," Durham told his fellow soldier.

One of the Chinese soldiers struck Durham with the butt of his gun. Durham fell, and when he did he was able to wrap his arms around the Chinese guard's legs and neutralize him. This prompted his friend to attack the other guard. They were both able to es-

cape.

The Army troops that Durham served with only totaled approximately 3,000 soldiers. At the end of this conflict, only 183 survived, with Durham being one of those. The survivors of the Battle of Chosin Reservoir would become known as the "Chosen Few", this term symbolizes their bravery and resilience as they fought their way out in harsh winter conditions, covering approximately 78 miles to reach safety. They are considered legends in military history.

These are just a couple of the countless, innumerable tales of our veterans who have served throughout the history of the United States. These stories highlight the service, sacrifice, and dedication of the countless men and women who have served to protect our freedoms and the freedoms of our allies. These men and women have seen things and experienced things that, by the grace of God, most of us haven't. I have never served, but I have numerous relatives who have. I support and respect our veterans and our active military. Retelling these stories is a great honor. To share pieces of history, and show the sacrifices these men made is a privilege. To any veteran or active service member who may be reading this, Thank You! My words will never adequately express my appreciation for your service, but Thank you!



Courtesy photo

Wreaths Across America honors Drew Co. Veterans

By **JEFF McDONALD**
editor@monticellonews.net

Last year's Wreaths Across America Day took place on Saturday, December 16. Thanks to a hard working and dedicated group of volunteers, 612 wreaths were distributed in Oakland Cemetery.

Mayor Jason Akers opened the ceremony with a brief statement, and County Judge Jessie Griffin (SGM, Ret) led an invocation and the Pledge of Allegiance.

In addition to the 612 graves that were adorned with a wreath, former State Representative LeAnn Burch said that there

were an additional eight graves located to add to this year's list.

Burch said that she was grateful for the volunteers who braved the rain that Saturday.


It was also noted that co-chairs for setting up this event, Sandy Funderburg and Louisa Smith did an amazing job.

According to Wreaths across America, the event at Oakland Cemetery was one of over 4,225 that took place across the country. In all, over three million veterans were honored that day.

See **WREATHS** Page 14




Courtesy Photo



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WREATHS

Continued from Page 14

“What I love most about this day, and this mission, is that it is so much more than just the placement of a wreath. The wreath is the catalyst, it brings together communities - families and strangers -- to learn about those who have served and sacrificed,” said Karen Worcester, executive director Wreaths Across America. “We have more than three million vol-

unteers across the country and a third of them are children. This mission and the events happening today provide the opportunity to teach kids about what freedom is.”

For more information about the year-long mission and ways to get involved in your own community, please visit www.wreathacrossamerica.org. National Wreaths Across America Day 2024 will be held on Saturday, December 14.



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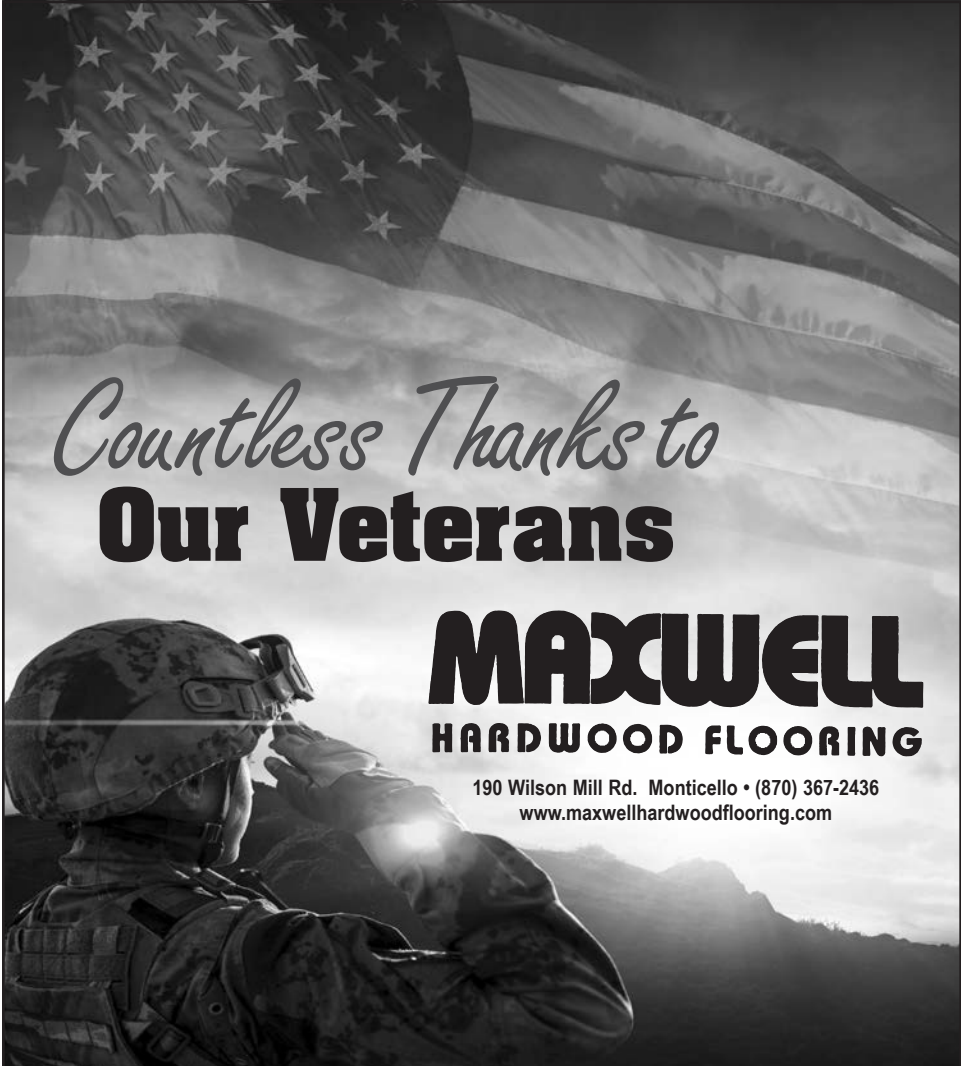


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