

THE MERCER MEMORIAL DAY 500 PRESENTS THE 2012 VETERAN HONOREES



During the 20 years he served his country on 7 ships, Bill Buchanan, USN, was an electrician's mate promoted to Naval Advisor as a Senior Chief Petty Officer. During his time at sea Bill was engaged in the Cuban Missile Crisis and two Vietnam deployments. While serving at Ben Tre aboard YRBM17 (yard river maintenance boat) Thanksgiving night 1967, the VietCong mined the YRBM causing multiple deaths, flooding and burning. Bill was one of the lucky ones who survived, being one compartment forward from the explosion. The VietCong thought they were mining the ammunition aboard but set the mines at the wrong end of the boat. Bill assisted with the clean-up and readied the ship to be towed out-of-country. He took part in the Tet Offensive in Vinh Luong Province providing gunfire support up and down the coast aboard the USS Orleck stationed at Yokuska, Japan. Stateside he became an instructor at the Naval Surface Warfare School. Bill believes in military service and serving his country. Bill and his wife, Donna, reside in Mercer.



Mike Gagich served as a USAAF waist gunner and engineer with the 401st Bomb Group, 613th Squadron aboard the Carrie B III, a B17 Flying Fortress. Their bomber was called at the last minute to replace one that had become disabled. The plane experienced heavy flak that took out 2 of their 4 engines on the way to bomb a German refinery. After hitting their target a 3rd engine quit and the plane began losing altitude. The crew ditched in the North Sea off the Dutch coast ending up in a 12' overcrowded life raft. Day turned into night as they drifted toward land and the waiting Germans. Many needed help walking as the icy water had paralyzed them from the waist down. The Germans took their uniforms and gave them blankets to walk through rain and snow with no shoes. (Crews didn't wear shoes onboard.) Mike was imprisoned at Stalag 13D and 7A. Mike recalls a time when the German guards protected him from bloodthirsty villagers and a guard accusing him of being a spy. He also recalls the terrifying experience of nearly falling out of the plane with the bombs when he was called to check on a bomb door that wouldn't release. His wife, Rosaline, was his sweetheart for 64 years lived in Sharon before her recent passing.



Tom Stanton, USAF/USA served his country during both the Korean and Vietnam Wars. He served in Vietnam with the 5th Battalion, 1st Division during 2 tours and was an Advance Advisor for the Vietnamese Army, eating and sleeping with them. When his unit was overrun by Vietcong he escaped death by lying down and letting the enemy walk over top of him. Twice he was missing in action and walked to safety out of the jungle bringing his sergeant and interpreter out with him. Tom still remembers helping bring out the bodies of fellow soldiers, sometimes only their heads. He participated in the Tet Offensive, Michelin Rubber Plantation, and the Battle of Hue. Tom was one of the most decorated officers to serve in Vietnam, working his way up to Colonel. He lives in Wheatland with his wife Marilyn.



In 1943 Greenville native Gustavus Kefurt, USA, joined Company K, 15th Infantry Regiment 3rd Division. Though wounded at Anzio, Italy, where he earned Purple Heart and Silver Star, he wanted to stay on with the 15th as they pressed through France toward Germany, and fought in the Battle of the Bulge. His final battle found him at Bennwihr, France on Christmas Eve. When he jumped through an opening in a wall he was confronted by 15 Germans, 10 of whom he killed, and captured the other five. While being fired upon Kefurt directed artillery fire on an enemy tank and successfully fought off several hostile patrols attempting to penetrate their lines. Next morning he led his platoon in hand-to-hand fighting through the town until blocked by a tank where he used rifle grenades to force surrender of its crew. He continued his attack going house to house against heavy machine gun fire. During a counterattack his platoon suffered heavy casualties but the men remained to fight because of Staff Sergeant Kefurt's personal example of bravery, determination and leadership. He constantly exposed himself to gunfire by going from man to man to direct fire and killed another 15 of the enemy at close range. Although severely wounded in the leg he refused first aid and immediately resumed fighting. When enemy forces to his rear were pushed back he still refused to be evacuated and moved painfully about under intense mortar fire, stiffening the resistance of his men and continuing to fire until a final bullet killed him. As a result of Gus's gallantry the position was maintained. He was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor for his actions during battle. He was exempted from serving because he had wife and children. But he went anyway. He thought it was the right thing to do.

THE ABOVE WILL BE HONORED AT THE MERCER COUNTY COURT HOUSE BANDSTAND
MONDAY, MAY 28TH BETWEEN 9 AND 9:45