

Veterans recognized for service with Quilt of Valor

BY KAREN SCHAFFNER

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Frank Hirrill is on a mission. He wants to honor every single veteran in Sierra Vista with a Quilt of Valor. The handmade quilt is awarded to a service member or veteran who has been touched by war.

He's beginning with World War II veterans since they are the oldest and most likely to shuffle off their mortal coil sooner rather than later. Hirrill, who is adjutant of the American Legion Bill Carmichael Post 52, has seven WWII members at the post and has already honored two. It's a mission after his own heart.

"It's about touching their lives before they leave this world and touching their families to show how important (the veterans) were," Hirrill said.

The most recent recipient, Charles Cunningham, 91, received his Quilt of Valor Wednesday night at a ceremony at the post. He not only received a quilt, he received a certificate honoring his 44 years of American Legion membership and also was given an honorary lifetime membership to the American Legion. This is no small thing, since in order for the lifetime honor to be given, there has to be a vote among

the members of the post. In this case, the vote was unanimous.

"He is only one of four who has (the lifetime honor)," Hirrill said. "We reserve that for when we really want to honor someone."

Cunningham is a World War II veteran who joined the military at the age of 16 in May 1946. He was awarded several medals, including the WWII Victory Medal; the Army Occupation Medal, Germany; and the National Defense Service Medal with Oak Leaf Cluster. Among his duty stations was a stint with the 94th Constabulary Squadron, where he policed German villages after the war.

Although WWII officially ended on Sept. 2, 1945, President Harry S. Truman did not declare an end to hostilities until the last day of 1946. Anyone who served prior to that date is considered a WWII veteran.

Hirrill, who arranged the event and is himself a war veteran, was quite moved by the ceremony.

"When you honor a person like that it's almost like you're putting them as your brother," Hirrill said. "I just have a different respect for them. I know what they went through. I just want them to know we're thank-

ful for their service."

Post Commander Bruce Callaghan said he was humbled and honored to be able to recognize Cunningham. Still, he said, it is not nearly enough.

"It is the least I can do, and I do mean least," he said. "Wish there was more but it is our privilege to honor those guys."

Callaghan spent more than 20 years in the service. He understands he is standing on the shoulders of veterans like Cunningham.

"For a guy like me, people like Mr. Cunningham paved the way for where we are today," he said.

But it's more than that, too. Hirrill saw friends and comrades fall in battle. He gets that when you honor a living veteran, you remember those who gave all.

"It's a way to honor the people that didn't get to be honored," Hirrill said.

If you know a WWII or Korean War veteran whom you would like to honor with a Quilt of Valor, Callaghan would like you to contact him or Hirrill at the American Legion Post 52 at 520-459-6050. The veteran doesn't have to be a member.

"We will gladly set up and even host a ceremony to recognize their veteran," Callaghan said.



MARK LEVY HERALD/REVIEW

Army veteran and American Legion Post 52 member Charles Cunningham is presented with a Quilts of Valor Foundation blanket made just for him during a special ceremony last week in Sierra Vista.