

## **Leon Goforth honored as Veteran of the Month**

*By Sherri Onorati, Special to The Leader*

April's Veteran of the Month is World War II veteran and life-long Covington resident Russell L. Goforth. He was nominated by Vernon Jerry Covington who remarked that he had no idea Goforth had served his country and was shocked to find out that he had earned a Purple Heart while doing so.

“I really didn't know a lot about Brother Leon, but one Sunday I happened to be behind him leaving church and on his license plate it said PH – Purple Heart and I did not know that. So I asked around and found out he had never been recognized and thought that needed to change. We need to recognize our veterans who have served us so diligently and so well and it was my honor to submit Brother Leon's name.”

Private First Class Leon Goforth was born in Covington in 1925, the son of Alvin Pearl Goforth and Lee Amy Baskins. He and his eight siblings were raised in Tipton County around the Indian Creek community.

Goforth was inducted into the U.S. Army on Jan. 25, 1944 and in February, began his introduction into Army life at Camp Forrest, Tenn. He received six-weeks of infantry training at Camp Gordon, as well as training as a 90mm antiaircraft gunner at Ft. Stewart, Ga. Once his initial training was completed he shipped out on the Queen Mary for Glasgow, Scotland, the first stop on his European tour, with his ultimate destination set as the Ardennes, Belgium.

The unfamiliar terrain and harsh weather conditions in Belgium, came as a surprise for Goforth and his unit, who were not equipped with cold weather gear. In addition to heavy fighting, the snow in their area was routinely more than two feet deep, and the lack of proper boots and winter clothing for those types of conditions made survival even more treacherous. Goforth and his fellow soldiers would dig pits, deep enough for two men to lie in while covered with tarps, together for body warmth to try to maintain body heat. The unit would rotate between fighting at the front lines and resting at the rear for weeks at a time. It was during one of his resting periods that a medic discovered that Goforth had severely frostbitten feet that had already turned black and sent him to a field hospital. He was soon transferred to a hospital outside London, as his wounds were worst than originally thought. It was soon discovered that his feet were also covered in open wounds, which the doctors suspected were from shrapnel. He received a Purple Heart Medal, the military's medal given for wounds received or death while in combat.

During his recovery, Goforth was sent to Baumholder, Germany to guard a general's wine cellar. He soon received orders to the South Pacific, but first was ordered to Ft. Sam Houston located in San Antonio, Texas to attend cook and bakery school. It was while he was still in school that the atom bombs were dropped on Japan, effectively cancelling his orders to the South Pacific Theater.

Goforth was discharged from the Army at the Discharge Center at Camp Chaffee, Ark., on Jan. 28, 1946, then made his way back to Covington by hitch-hiking.

In 1947, he married the love of his life, Lorraine Mills, and built a home using the GI Bill. They soon filled the home with three children, two grandchildren, three great-grandchildren and one great-great grandchild. He and Lorraine are members of Holly Grove Cumberland Presbyterian Church.

In addition to earning the Purple Heart Medal, Goforth was awarded the World War II Victory Ribbon, Good Conduct Medal, American Theatre Ribbon, and European-African-Middle Eastern Theatre Ribbon with three Bronze Service Stars for his service.

Goforth is extremely proud of his family's contributions to the defense of the United States and gave an accounting of his family's military ties.

"My great-grandfather was in the War of the States, my father was in World War I, my two oldest brothers served in World World II and I was in World War II and the three of us went overseas," he recalled. "Charles Holey was in the Korea War, Alvin was in Korea, Billy was in the Army and then joined the National Guard and retired and the last of the seven boys was Warner and he spent his two years of time in the Army so you can say that all seven of us boys of this family had been in the Army and spent our time for our nation."

"We went on patrols and went out and met the enemy," reminisced Goforth. "We went to find out where they were at, but we weren't suppose to engage them. We had to radio in and they would send back that part and then we let the artillery and strappers do that part of it, although I did carry a BR – a Browning automatic rifle with a tripod. It usually held 16 shots in the magazine and it was a pretty good load. It was some tough times at that time but we came through it and that was the main part."

Covington mayor Justine Hanson thanked Goforth for his service, both to the U.S. and to Covington.

"On behalf of the City of Covington, I want to say thank you sir for your service, not only to our country but to our community," said Hanson. "I appreciate you sir and it's an honor to be here."

The Tipton County Veteran's Council presented Goforth with several awards for his years of service, including a certificate of honor, a years membership in the Tipton County Veterans Council, a certificate for a canvas portrait given by Munford Funeral Home, a two hour house cleaning by Merry Maids and a resolution signed by the governor and a flag flown over the state capitol, given by District 81 State Representative Deborah Moody.

"It is with heartfelt appreciation of your tireless efforts in support of our United States, the Tipton County Museum, Veterans Memorial and Nature Center in partnership with the Tipton County Veteran Council gratefully acknowledges your service as our veteran of the month," read Kathy Desjarlais, president of the Tipton County Veterans Council. "Your dedication to our country is commendable and an honorable addition to the fight for freedom in the world."

Local VFW commander James "Butch" Moeller thanked Goforth for his service.

"Private First Class Goforth there is absolutely no amount of words that can be enough to thank you for what you have done," said Moeller, commander of VFW Post 4148, "but on behalf of the Veterans of Foreign Wars and the Disable American Veterans, we do thank you very much sir."

Goforth's youngest daughter, Denise Kinney was very pleased to see her father recognized for his military service.

"It's fantastic that he is being recognized tonight," said Kinney. "It's fantastic! My daddy deserved this a long time ago. He's like a lot of men who served – they don't talk about it. It was too difficult. But I am really proud of him – all seven sons and even his two sisters were married and their husbands served and returned and several of his grandchildren have served.

"It has been an honor to be honored like this and you never known how many good friends you have until something like this comes out," said Goforth when asked if he was surprised at the number of people who came to honor him.

The Veteran of the Month program is sponsored by the Tipton County Museum, Veteran Memorial and Nature Center and the Tipton County Veterans Council. Sponsors of the monthly event include Tipton County Veterans Council, Patriot Bank, The Bank of Tipton and Munford Funeral Home. Underwriters include the VFW Post 4840 and the Disable American Veterans Auxiliary in Millington. Honorees are recognized on the second Tuesday of the month at 6:30 p.m. and the public is invited to both make nominations and to attend the ceremony.

#### PICTURE

Leon Goforth, back right, is picture with two of three of his remaining brothers, Charles Newman Holey Goforth and Alvin "Bud" Goforth, Jr.