



June 2019 Veteran of the Month

Fred Walker Bray Jr.

The Tipton County Museum Veteran of the Month for June, 2019, is Fred Walker Bray, Jr. Fred was born on February 16, 1954, in Caruthersville, Missouri, and moved to Tipton County in 1967. One week after graduating from Covington High School in 1972 he got married; and a week after that he was at Parris Island, South Carolina, for Marine Corps Reserves Basic Training. Fred felt a strong need to serve his country as his father was part of the 101st Airborne Division and part of the occupational forces in Japan. During his time in the Marine Corps Reserves Fred worked with the A-4E Skyhawk planes - first as a mechanic, then as a plane captain. During this time his daughter Nicki Lee Bray Miller was born; and as a young man with a family he wanted to learn skills that would be readily transferred to the private sector after serving his country. With no opportunity for a different job classification with the Marine Corps, he looked to the Air Force, which guaranteed him a job as an air conditioning and refrigeration specialist. After spending four years in the Marine Corps Reserves, he joined the Air Force in 1976, hoping for a better life for him and his family. He attended Air Force Basic Training at Lackland Air Force Base, later describing Air Force basic training as “more genteel” than Marine Corps basic training. Because of his previous military service, he was appointed Dorm Chief, and he was affectionately known as “Baby Bird.” He became a Refrigeration and Air Conditioning Specialist and worked in the Mobile Command Centers as was part of the 507th Technical Air Command Center out of Sumter, South Carolina. During this time he was blessed with a son, Michael James Bray. Being gone for over a month with each command center activation or deployment was difficult on him and his growing family. Trying to do what was best for all concerned, he chose not to reenlist and received an honorable discharge from the Air Force. He and his family moved back to Tipton County in 1980, and he went to work for the State of Tennessee as an air conditioning mechanic. For his time in the military he was awarded the Rifle Marksmanship badge, the Air Force Outstanding Unit Award, the Air Force Longevity Service Award Ribbon, the Air Force Good Conduct Medal, and the Marine Corps Good Conduct Medal.

It wasn't long before his first marriage ended in divorce. Fred met his second wife, Carol, at the Arlington Developmental Center, where she was working as a nurse. She had two small boys, Matthew and Jason, and in 1983 they all became a family. In 1998 he went to work for the Tennessee Department of Corrections starting as a Facilities Supervisor before being promoted to Facilities Manager. He retired in 2014 after serving a total of 37 ½ years with the State of Tennessee. Sadly, his son Michael passed away at a young age, but today his daughter Nicki works as an RN at Methodist North Hospital; stepson Jason works in Arlington, Tennessee, at Plasma Coatings; and stepson Matthew lives in Lexington, Tennessee, and is a long distance truck driver. In addition, Fred and Carol have 12 grandchildren and 3 great grandchildren, with another one on the way. Fred continues to serve his community. In 2016 he joined the Sons of Confederate Veterans; and he and Carol became Tipton County Master Gardeners that same year. Then in 2017 they both joined the Order of the Confederate Rose and became members of the Tipton County Museum. Fred was nominated for Veteran of the Month by fellow Master Gardener Paula Sweatt.