

Son Follows in Father's Footsteps

By Sherri Onorati, Special to The Leader

World War II veteran Rudolph Boykin, Sr., was honored as the Veteran of the Month in March, and now his namesake, Rudolph Boykin, Jr., has been selected as the June 2017 Veteran of the Month, nominated by family friend and fellow veteran John McBride, surround by family and friends.

Boykin, Jr., was the first son and third born of 14 children to Boykin, Sr. and his wife, Annie Sue Flowers on June 6, 1948 in Covington. He was drafted in the United States Army on Oct. 22, 1968, and was sent to Ft. Campbell, Ky., where he received eight-weeks of basic training, before being sent to Ft. Polk, La., to attend Advance Infantry Training. Boykin, Jr., took to the military even with its rigid discipline and rules and quickly advanced in rank, earning his private first class stripes by the end of his training.

He arrived in Vietnam in April 1969 at the age of 21 and quickly settled into a routine. By September of that year, he had shown his maturity and dedication and was given the responsibilities of squad leader and promoted to sergeant. Boykin and his men were responsible for conducting daily reconnaissance patrols, searching and eliminating the enemy.

Before he left for Vietnam, Boykin, Jr. proposed to and then married his high school sweetheart, Virginia A. Nelson on Mar. 22, 1969, her birthday. He said he got married before he left because he wanted something to look forward to.

“For me, I needed something to come home to – something to stay alive for, and she was it,” explained Boykin, Jr.

Boykin, Jr., and his new bride corresponded regularly during his tour in Vietnam, and it was those letters of love and tales of family, that gave him purpose to survive the war. That sense of purpose was never more evident than on Jan 23, 1970, when Boykin, Jr., was wounded in battle – wounds which resulted in the loss of his right arm above the elbow. He was returned to the U.S. and spent the next 11 months in rehabilitation at Walter Reed Hospital in Washington, D.C.

Boykin revealed his family didn't know for more than a month that he had been hurt or even that he was back in the United States.

“The Army gave us the option if something happened to us that they would tell our families or we could. I told them that if I was still living, I wanted to,” remembered Boykin, Jr. “After about a month, my captain said it was time to call home. So, I did and my mom answered, bless her heart. I told her I had some bad news, and when I told her I got shot, well, she kind of she lost it.”

Boykin Jr.'s bravery and valor resulted in him being awarded the Bronze Star Medal with “v” device, Purple Heart Medal, Army Commendation Medal, National Defense Service Medal, Vietnam Service Medal, Republic of Vietnam Campaign Medal with Device 1960, and Combat Infantryman, Expert, and Sharpshooter Badges.

“I was looking at the Memorial of those killed in Vietnam before I came in and I didn't know a lot of those names, but I did know Warren Ingram, Odell Craig, and James Wilks,” Boykin, Jr. told those who gathered to honor him. “I went to school with those three guys, and they, along with myself and others who served in Vietnam, did not get properly rewarded or acknowledge for our service. During the 60s, there were a lot of turmoil, we had a president get killed, we Jack Ruby going on, the leader of the black movement get killed and we had a man who landed on the moon.... We had a lot going on at that time and Vietnam was pushed to the side. But I want to thank you all for remembering me now. I am very honored.”

The Tipton County Veteran's Council presented Boykin 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.

Covington Mayor Justin Hanson was in attendance and thanked Boykin for his service on behalf of the city and county.

State Representative Debra Moody presented Boykin with a U.S. flag from Nashville, saying, "I can hand you this flag but I feel that you deserve so much more," said Moody. "It was an honor for me to get to do this for you and I thank you for your service, and for your family being at home and taking care of things so you could go do that for us. Thank you!"

Two of the most passionate speakers of the night came from Boykin's own family. His brother-in-law, Pastor Clarence Nelson and sister Joyce Boykin Glass, each paid tribute to their loved one, they affectionately call Jerry.

"We know it was your feet on the ground in Vietnam, but the war was in all of our homes," said Nelson, "but we didn't have to go because you were there and we can't thank you enough for that. You have really showed us what a true man is all about. With all the obstacles you faced when you got back, and I know you struggled, and you were a trained marksman but you never turned to a gun, you kept striving and digging and trying until you found your calling and I just want to say thank you so very much from the Nelson family for being the standup gentleman that you are. You have truly shown us there are always alternatives to dealing with issues in life."

"I want you to know that we look up to you," said sister, Joyce Glass. "You are the big brother in our lives and when you came home, it was hard but we prayed and we prayed and God made it all right. Look at what you're doing now... he's driving the disable. He didn't let his handicap stop him from doing what he had to do. He's always trying to help somebody and I just want to thank God for you Jerry. We love you."

"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."

After being honorably discharged, Boykin, Jr. returned home to Virginia and a newborn daughter, the blessing of a surprised R & R visit, with an 80 percent disability. With a young family to provide for, Boykin, Jr., attended vocational school and learned to repair lawn mowers, receiving his diploma in 1973. The Boykin family grew once more as they welcomed the addition of a son, Rudolphus, in 1975. Boykin, Jr. and his bride recently celebrated 48 years of happily wedded bliss, but one, which has also had its sorrows. Two of the biggest heartbreaks were the loss of their beloved son, Rudolphus, in an auto accident in 2000, and the loss of their grandson Treyon to cancer in 2002. Today, they are the proud grandparents of six beautiful grandchildren.

Daughter Tawanna Haynes laughed when she heard her father had a marksman and sharpshooter badge.

"I was wondering where I got my marksmanship from!" she said laughing. "I've been so proud of this man for a very long time. I've always been a daddy's girl so anything he does is an accomplishment to me."

Rudy has been employed with Delta Human Resources as a van driver for the past 16 years. He and Virginia are members of St. Luke Baptist Church in Covington.

"Thank you for this evening," ended Boykin. "We had men who would go over there and fight and come back as brothers. And some of them had a hard time readjusting. I went from Vietnam to hospital so I was able to adjust with help from counselors, but those who went and who weren't

injured was expected to come home and pick up their lives on their own. There was no help for them and my brother was one of them. So I thank you for this honor.”

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.