

War is Hell says April's Veteran of the Month

By Sherri Onorati, Special to The Leader

Tipton County native James Noah Craig was recently recognized as the April honoree for the Veteran of the Month program. Nominated by family friend Beverly Burk, Craig is a World War II veteran who served under General George C. Patton.

With many friends and family in attendance, Craig was honored at the monthly ceremony held at the Tipton County Museum, Veteran Memorial and Nature Center for his exemplary service to his country during a tumultuous period of history.

Born on Aug. 18, 1918 to James A. and Mary Holloman Craig on the family's farm in Beaver, Tenn., he attended Craig's Chapel during his primary school years. A family move brought Craig and his family to Atoka in 1931 where he graduated from Munford High School.

On August 15, 1940, Craig enlisted into the United States Army and was sent to Fort Benning, Ga., for basic training. He trained under George C. Patton, a colonel then and commander of the Second Armored Division. He completed additional training at Fort Bragg, where he learned to fix and maintain the Army's ordinance weapons and equipment.

Once his training was complete, Craig shipped overseas and entered the war at Casablanca, North Africa. Stationed with the 2nd Armored Div., he took part in the invasion of Sicily and France. He landed at Omaha Beach and saw action in Belgium, Holland and Germany before being discharged in July 1945.

"We landed at Casablanca in 1942 and went on to [Saint Laurent]. The Germans were about five miles from where we were," recounted an emotional Craig, struggling with the memories. "I swear you could almost feel the ground twitching, they were bringing in so much artillery and divisions into that place. I think they were fixing to get us all killed and put into that graveyard you could see at Omaha. But we survived, and one afternoon the sun came out and I've never seen the sky so blue in my life."

Craig married Doris Leach when he returned home and they lived in Memphis where he worked as a ticket agent for Trailways, Kl Case Company and then Tri State Trailways for 27 years before retiring in 1983. Craig and his wife Doris raised two children, Patricia Carol Williams and James Otis Craig. After his wife's passing in 1997, Craig married Bernice Delashmit and they moved to Atoka where they attend Millington First United Methodist Church.

Family friend Beverly Burk said she felt compelled to recognize Craig for his service. "He's 97 years old, sharp as he can be and the member of a group of rapidly diminishing World War II veterans," said Burk. "When [Craig and his wife] walked in to my Sunday school class five years ago we knew that we had found a gem. Jim is a walking history

book. He understood when he was in the service what John F. Kennedy said years later, 'Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country.'

"Jim, we and our country thank you for your service and what you did for us. You are indeed, as Tom Brokaw said, a member of the greatest generation."

The Tipton County Veteran's Council presented the nonagenarian with several awards for his many 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 and a flag flown over the state capitol, signed by the governor and 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," said Wanda Bellows, reading from the certificate of honor presented to Craig. "Your dedication to our country is commendable and an honorable addition to the fight for freedom in the world."

Dr. Scott Craig, the honoree's grandson said he grew up listening to his grandfather's stories.

"He's a great storyteller and makes what he went through come alive," said Scott Craig. "He's 97 years old and those four years he was in the service was like the greatest years of his life. His stories made me appreciate who he was as a person."

"I volunteered before the draft even started," said Craig. "I had it in my mind I was going to be a 30 year veteran but I changed my mind after all of that, I said I had enough, so I come home," he added laughing. "But I don't think [young people] understand it. Too many of them are looking for a good time and partying and all of that. I don't think they understand what we're faced with right now. I hope that we never have another war like that because until you've gone through that, you have no idea what its like. And I'd rather go back myself then see one of my young grandkids go. I'd go back in a minute before I'd let them go. As the old saying goes, 'war is hell!'"

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.