

## **Munford resident honored as Veteran of the Month**

*By Sherri Onorati, Special to The Leader*

Long-time Munford resident Ted Kesler, a 20-year Navy veteran, was honored as the February Veteran of the Month during a recognition ceremony held at the Tipton County Museum, Veteran Memorial and Nature Center last week. The monthly ceremony, now in its second year, honors Tipton County veterans and their service to the county and to the United States of America.

His good friend, Terry Mullins, nominated the honoree and Mullins' explanation on how he obtained Kesler's military info needed for the nomination form, made the room erupt in laughter, a scene which was played over and over throughout the ceremony.

"I've know Ted for 26 years and he's been a lifelong friend, but I didn't know all the details about his sea tours, so I called his wife Barbara," said Mullins. "She grilled him for a couple of hours that night on his tours. The next morning we're headed to prayer breakfast and we stopped at McDonald's for a coffee and Ted says to me, 'Terry, I think something is going on. I think I may be dying. I think my wife is writing my obituary!'"

Mullins continued, telling those in attendance of Ted's love for his shipmates.

"Ted is a true friend and once you get to know him you can't get enough of Ted. You meet him and you're going to want to see him again. I think that's because of his big heart and he wants to help anyone he can," explained Mullins. "He truly takes care of his shipmates and keeps in contact with them – sends them cards, phones them and tries to stay in their lives. He's truly been an inspiration to me. These guys are very humble and would never ever seek something like this. You have to almost pry them out to get them in the public. On his last speech to his men up here in Covington, General Nathan Bedford Forrest said 'We show our countrymen by our conduct and our dignity that brave soldiers make always make good citizens and law abiding and loyal people,' We see things that people back home don't see and it makes us appreciate what we have and we want to come back and make sure it stays that way and Ted is a fine example of that."

Kathy Desjarlais, president of the Tipton County Veterans Council, read Kesler's impressive bio and presented him with a certificate of honor for his selection as the February Veteran of the Month. In addition to the certificate of honor, Kesler was also presented with a voucher for a free canvas portrait, courtesy of Munford Funeral Home, a Veteran of the Month coffee mug and a year membership in the Tipton County Veteran's Council.

Kesler, born and raised in a small town in Oklahoma, joined the Navy to follow in the footsteps of his older brother. Enlisting at the tender age of 17 on Dec 12, 1951, he completed bootcamp at San Diego, Calif., before he joining his brother on the USS Rockwell (APA-230) for his first sea tour as a commissaryman, who in those days served as the ship's cooks.

Kesler, in true sailor style, proceeded to tell those in attendance a few "sea stories" of his career, which had the room in constant laughter.

"My first ship was the Rockwall and I grew up on that ship," he said. "I spent two and a half years on that ship as a teenager and when I got out after that first tour I was going to set the world on fire, but after 10 months I ran out of matches."

Kesler quickly rejoined the Navy and was sent to Pearl Harbor, Hawaii in 1955 to become a member of one of the Navy's tugboat which had been assigned to 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox as a prop for their movie, "The Enemy Below," which was directed by Dick Powell, where he cooked for the film's crew.

He was on shore duty at Great Lakes, Ill., when he met the love of his life, his wife Barbara in 1960. He told the crowd he actually met her boyfriend first, which led into another wonderful sea story and more laughter from those in attendance.

"I came to Great Lakes from Guam and a friend introduced me to her boyfriend and her," he began. "I went back and told my friends, 'I seen a red head and I'm going to take her away from that corpsman.' But they didn't believe me."

Barbara was the manager at a candy store at the time and was headed to the bank to make a deposit when Kesler came upon her in the street.

"I stepped up on the curb, right up in her face and said when are me and you going out on a date," he recalled. "She said 'I don't guess I am, I'm going with Ed,' that was her boyfriend and I said, 'When's Ed got duty again?'"

Kesler said they started dating soon after that conversation and have been together ever since, marrying on Nov. 25, 1961.

Throughout his 20 years of duty as a Navy cook, Kesler has been stationed at many exotic ports. He's completed tours in the Panama Canal Zone at the height of the Cuban missile crisis, Key West, Fla., Adak, Alaska and Guantanamo Bay, Cuba before arriving in Millington in 1968 for his last tour of duty. Kesler retired from naval service as a Petty Officer First Class on Jan. 28, 1972.

"Well, I appreciate this here and I don't take it lightly. It's an honor," said Kesler, of the night's recognition and of his military career. "It was a great honor to serve. The military taught me discipline, discipline and discipline and I appreciated that."

After his retirement from service, he worked at Turner's Dairy for 13 years before retiring from the local company in 1985. Today, he is well into his third career as an air conditioning repairman of his own company.

An active member of the Tipton County Veterans Council, and a lifetime member of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, Kesler and his wife are also faithful members of Poplar Grove United Methodist Church in Drummonds.

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 premier sponsor Tipton County Veterans Council, Patriot Bank, The Bank of Tipton and Munford Funeral Home. Underwriters include the VFW Ray Pinner Post 4840 and the Disable American Veterans Auxiliary Unit 116 in Millington and Dunham Loge 50. The next honoree will be named on Tuesday, March 8 at 6:30 p.m. The public is invited to both make nominations and attend the ceremony.