

## **Clifton honored as Veteran of the Month**

*By Sherri Onorati, Special to The Leader*

Gainville native Ridley Clifton was honored as the July Veteran of the Month at last week's monthly ceremony held at the Tipton County Museum, Veteran Memorial and Nature Center surrounded by family, friends, community leaders and fellow veterans.

Nominated by his wife Kathy, Clifton, the son of Mr. and Mrs. Bailey Clifton, was born and raised on the family farm in Gainsville where he was the oldest of five. He came of age during the Vietnam War and when the draft was in full force. Wanting to make his own decision on how to best serve his country, Clifton enlisted in the United States Navy a few short months after his graduation from Byars-Hall High School in 1967.

"I joined the military to avoid the draft," revealed Clifton, chuckling with those in attendance. "I knew if I got drafted, I wouldn't have much of a choice so I thought about it and I knew my dad had been drafted in the Navy during World War II, so I said okay, I'll join the Navy."

After completing boot camp and additional training to work as a Machinist Mate, Clifton soon found himself assigned to his first naval vessel, the USS Sproston (DD-577), a destroyer homeported at Pearl Harbor, and later the USS Harry E. Hubbard (DD-748), another destroyer assigned to the Western Pacific which was his ride to the Vietnam war zone, not once but three times.

"They let you think that you're going to get the job you want in boot camp," he explained. "I wanted to be a construction welder in the Seabees. I did not want to be on a ship, but while I was waiting to go to boot camp, they went to my school and looked at my test scores and found out what I was best suited for and that's where they put me – in the bottom of the ship," he added laughing.

Clifton said he enjoyed his tour of duty and was grateful for the time he was able to visit other countries.

"I went halfway around the world and saw how other people lived," he said. "Sometimes the poverty just shocked me."

In addition to serving in the war zone, he also saw duty in Australia and New Zealand before returning stateside to Long Beach, Calif., for his last tour of duty.

It was while stationed in Long Beach, that Clifton met his future wife, Kathy, who was a member of the local YWCA Christian Girls group. Having met the love of his life, Clifton stayed in the Long Beach area after his receiving an honorable discharge in Sept 1971 as a Machinist Mate Third Class (MM3), and became a federal firefighter with the Long Beach Naval Air Station. He and Kathy married in 1973 and stayed in California for the next three decades to raise their family.

In 2005, Clifton and his wife returned to the county of his birth and his family. They are members of the Ebenezer Cumberland Presbyterian Church, where Clifton is a church Elder.

The Tipton County Veteran's Council presented Clifton 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 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 Kathy Desjarlais, president of the Tipton County Veterans Council said, reading from the certificate of honor presented to Clifton. “Your dedication to our country is commendable and an honorable addition to the fight for freedom in the world.”

Clifton was very humble when accepting his awards and recognition.

“I am very surprised and honored,” he said. “Sometimes, I don’t think that I did very much but then again I did do my part. I spent most of four years running steam through a steam plant, but without us they wouldn’t have been able to fire their guns accurately or go where we needed to go. I think a lot of people are more deserving, but I am very honored.”

Clifton said although he served during a time of war, he would do it all over again.

“If the nation needed me I would go back in,” he said. “I got to go to places that I wouldn’t have been able to go if I hadn’t joined. I learned about how the rest of the rest of the world lives. When I was in Hawaii, many guys were complaining about being on “the rock” but I thought, there were a lot of people on the mainland that paid a lot of money to go there,” he added smiling.

“A lot of people say they hated their military experience or wouldn’t do it again, but I wouldn’t take a million dollars for it. You do a lot of growing up and I was grateful for that.”

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.