

## Former District 81 Candidate honored as Veteran of the Month

By Sherri Onorati, Special to The Leader

July's Veteran of the Month, James Daniel Hardin, is no stranger to hard work and serving his community. The Covington resident has dedicated his entire life to the service of his country and to his fellow man.

At a reception held in his honor last Tuesday at the Tipton County Museum, Hardin joked and laughed and revealed to friends and family in attendance, the unlikely circumstances that altered his plans from wearing Army green to Navy blue when he walked into a military recruitment office on Oct. 10, 1982.

"I was working in a chicken place as a lowly manager and I knew I was going nowhere fast," explained Hardin. "I walked into a recruiting station and I was going to join the Army. I was a big Douglas MacArthur fan and I just always thought if I was ever going to join the service it was going to be the Army. But the Army recruiter was out to lunch and the Navy guy said he'd be back in a couple of hours but within that two hours, he had me in the Navy! And I'll tell you, God bless you fellows in the Army, 'cause after spending a year training and going to Iraq with you, I've learned you live hard. So, that was a good day I walked in and the Navy guy was there!"

Hardin was nominated for the veteran monthly honor by fellow veteran and long-time friend, Andy Dunavant.

"I've learned to love Jim and his family," the World War II home-town hero stated. "He's a great Christian and a great family man. He and his family have been a great asset to our town, our country and to our church. With everything he's done, he deserved the recognition."

Hardin told the crowd that he was surprised and honored to have been nominated for the honor, especially by a member of our country's "greatest generation"

"I'm honored to be nominated by one of our greatest generation who fought in WWII and the Battle of the Bulge." Hardin said. "It's an extreme honor. For all of us who are veterans, we are standing on the shoulders of so many who served before us. The battles of Bunker Hill when our nation was first formed. The War of 1812 and the war with Mexico, the Halls of Montezuma to the great Civil War where you had honorable men on both sides who were fighting for what they believed in. Teddy Roosevelt and the Rough Riders, WWI, WWII, Korea and Vietnam veterans. Desert Storm and Desert Shield, Grenada.... God bless you guys! You have so many people we follow. I think we all recognize that we're just one of the bricks on the foundation of liberty that were established by so many before us. We're just adding to that foundation."

Hardin said he's very thankful his wife Debbie stuck by him during his military career, even though she didn't know she would be living the life of a military spouse.

"I was kind of young and dumb and didn't realize deep conversations about life changing events should be discussed," said Hardin laughing, "I went home and said, 'honey, guess what I did today?'"

"We had already been married for four years, so I did not guess that at all," added wife Debbie, giggling.

"But she stuck with me all this time when I joined the Navy. I had a wife and my oldest daughter, Sarah when I joined. My family came in with me and they went out with me. I couldn't have done it all those years without her."

Born and raised in Texas, Hardin attended boot camp in San Diego, Calif., followed by aviation A School at Millington. During his 12 years on active duty, he was stationed at various stations, including New Orleans, Dallas Naval Air Station, and Millington. He worked on A-7 Corsairs, F-14 Tom Cats, a P-3 Orion squadron, and he also supported a Marine Corps Squadron of F-4 Phantoms. A year after taking advantage of an "early out" program, he left active duty and became a civilian. But after a year, rejoined

the Navy as a reservist in December 1995. This time he worked in law enforcement and physical security, detainee operations, convoy operations, and as an instructor in Force Protection onboard the USS Lexington (CV-16), USS Forrestal (CV-59), and USS Dwight D. Eisenhower (CVN-69) as well as in various other locations, including overseas. After Sept. 11, 2001, he was recalled to active duty three times. He deployed to Iraq in 2008 as part of a joint taskforce operation with the U.S. Army Military Police, working out of FOB Camp Bucca, near Basra, Iraq.

After 25 years of active and reserve service, Hardin retired in 2009 as a first class petty officer. A top-notch sailor, Hardin has been awarded more than 20 medals and ribbons for his service including two Navy Commendation Medals, an Army Commendation medal, two Navy Achievement medals, one Army Achievement medal, the Global War on Terrorism Expeditionary Medal and the Iraqi Liberation Medal.

After retiring, Hardin continue to serve his fellow citizens through his work with Veterans Affairs and as a former candidate for the District 81 state representative seat. Today, he works for the Naval Surface Warfare Center in Crane, Indiana.

He and his wife Debbie have been married 38 years. They have 3 children, 8 grandchildren, and a 9th grandchild due in August 2017. He and Debbie are members of First Baptist Church in Covington where he is an ordained Deacon and has taught Sunday school. He is a life member of the Veterans of Foreign Wars and is a former member of the American Legion.

When asked knowing what he knows now, would he go back and change anything, like waiting around for that Army recruiter to get back from lunch, he laughed and said no.

“My life took so many different turns that got me where I am today that I don’t know that I’d change anything,” reflected Hardin. “I’m in a good place today.

Kathy Desjarlais, president of the Tipton County Veterans Council read Hardin’s certificate of honor, thanking him for his service and presenting him with several awards for his years of service, including a certificate of honor, a year’s 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 Debra Moody.

“It’s been a privilege to be a part of this program and to meet so many great veterans in our county,” said Moody. “Thank you for your service and your continued service to our community and country.”

Tipton County Girl Scout troop 13804 helped with the event’s hosting and provided wonderful and tasty treats for the reception which were thoroughly enjoyed by the guests.

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.