

Former Brighton Mayor July's Veteran of the Month

By Sherri Onorati, Special to The Leader

Sercy V. Marshall, a veteran of World War II and a former mayor of Brighton, was honored as July's Veteran of the Month during last week's ceremony. Well attended by family and friends, the monthly recognition program paid homage to the Brighton native in honor of his service during America's involvement in the Second World War.

Marshall was nominated by fellow Dunham lodge member Rob Witherington who spoke of the reason for his nomination.

"I met Mr. Sercy about six years ago when I joined the lodge," said Witherington. "He's one of the finest gentlemen you'll ever meet in your life and he is really the patriarch of our lodge. We've had several conversations about his experiences during the war and his life growing up, and I've always laughed and said when I grow up I want to be like Mr. Sercy. It's a great honor to have Sercy as a friend and somebody to look up to. We thank him for his service to our country, to the city of Brighton and to our county."

Marshall, born in Brighton in 1927, was one of 11 children born to James Archie and Julia Pearl Mims Marshall. He attended schools in Brighton and Munford, and later learned to weld for Virginia Bridges and Pigeon Thomas in Memphis and Merry Time Shipyard in Mobile, Ala.

He joined the United States Army at the tender age of 18 on Dec. 5, 1945, joining the 33rd Infantry Division at Leyte, Philippines. Stationed in the South Pacific for the duration of the war, Marshall saw service on Bagatao Island and in Japan during its occupation. He returned to the Philippines and served as a military policeman with the 5th Replacement Depot at the capital city of Manila until he was honorably discharged from the Army in April 1947.

Raised and instilled with a strong sense of patriotism, Marshall, one of six boys who all served their country, told attendees that his service was a result of looking up to his older brother, James.

"All of my brothers served, over a period of time and different wars – three in the Navy and three of us in the Army," said Marshall, the second oldest son. "My older brother went in the Navy and a couple of years later I couldn't wait to go in to get him out," he remarked to laughter. "He's one of the reasons I went in. I looked up to him 'cause he was my big brother."

The memories of Marshall's experiences during the war are still obviously painful to talk about, and he had a difficult time speaking of what he saw while in Japan. He told those in attendance that although many people hated the dropping of the atomic bomb, the war would have turned out much different if it hadn't been done.

“This is one of the best countries in the world,” he said. “If you ever went overseas, you’ll know why it’s so special. I’ve been always been happy to come home.”

One pleasant memory that Marshall has of his wartime service was being able to share in the jubilation of the Filipino people as they celebrated their independence on July 4, 1946 with the signing of the Treaty of Manila.

“I went back to the Philippines as an MP after Japan, and was there when they got their independence,” he said. “I was standing on the old road watching the parade. It was a wonderful time.”

After the war, Marshall returned to Memphis where he worked for Conley Frog and Switch Company for approximately a year as a welder before gaining employment with International Harvester. There, he worked as a welder for several years, eventually, earning a promotion as foreman of the welding department. He stayed with International Harvester for more than 35 years, retiring in Dec. 1981.

Civic-minded, Marshall has been very active in his community and in his church, Brighton Baptist. There, he has taught bible classes and has been a deacon of the church for the past 55 years. He served two terms as an alderman for the Town of Brighton from 1966 to 1970, and then was elected as the town’s mayor in 1972. He served as the Mayor of Brighton for 20 years, before stepping down in 1992 and is the town’s longest serving mayor. Marshall is also an active member of the Mason Dunham Lodge 150 in Covington, joining in 1953. In addition, he is also a Royal Arch and Scottish Rite Mason. In 1991, he was honored as a Knight Commander of the Court of Honor and on Dec. 12, 2009, he was designated as an inspector general honorary mason, having achieved the auspicious rank of 33 degree.

Marshall married the love of his life, Juanita Weir, on Feb. 3, 1946 during a brief visit home during the war. They were happily married for 69 years before her recent passing on June 23, 2015. They raised three daughters, Teresa, Annette and Tina, who in turned, blessed the family with five grandchildren and six great-grandchildren.

One of Marshall’s daughters, Teresa Miller spoke what his recognition meant to him.

“This is the greatest honor for him,” said Miller. “He is so patriotic and it really touches his heart. He didn’t really talk about what he saw to us while we were growing up, but he was so proud to be in the service and to have served his country. He has so much respect for the United States.”

Covington Mayor Justin Hanson also attended the program, thanking Marshall for his dedication.

“Congratulations Mr. Sercy, I was told that there were going to be a lot of folks here to congratulate you and I wanted to be one of them,” said Hanson. “I thank you for your service and I appreciate your service to Brighton... you’ve had a multi-talented life!”

“I’m very proud and it wasn’t something that I ever expected,” said Marshall of the evening’s recognition. “It’s a great honor and I thank you all.”

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. The next honoree will be named on Tuesday, Aug. 11 at 6:30 p.m. The public is invited to both make nominations and attend the ceremony.