

Munford resident honored as veteran of the month

By Sherri Onorati

Vietnam era veteran and Munford resident Larry Wayne Purvis was honored on Tuesday evening as the August Veteran of the Month at a reception held in his honor at the Tipton County Museum, Veterans Memorial and Nature Center.

Long-time friend, coworker and former apprentice, Clay Huddleston of Munford, nominated Purvis to be recognized as a Veteran of the Month.

“First and foremost, I want to thank all veterans in here because without you this country would not be anything,” said Huddleston to the gathered crowd of friends, co-workers, and veterans from various military organizations. “Larry Wayne, I really want to thank you for the eight years that you did in the military and I’d like to thank you for the friendship that you’ve given me. I was a young buck apprentice and Larry took me under his wings and taught me a lot about airplanes. I learned a lot from you, Larry and I really appreciate that.”

Purvis, originally from Dillon, South Carolina moved with his family to Georgia as a teenager. Never one to run away from a challenge, he joined the United States Marine Corps in 1970, a few months after graduating from high school, at a time when those serving in the military were not supported. The Vietnam War was ongoing, the My Lai massacre had just been discovered and protests against U.S. involvement in Southeast Asia were at an all time high.

“John Wayne and the *Sands of Iwo Jima*,” explained Purvis, when asked what made him join the Marine Corps during the Vietnam War. “No, really... When I was a kid, I watched John Wayne and said that’s what I want to do,” he added laughing.

He completed his initial military training at Parris Island, South Carolina, after which, he received his specialized training in avionics mechanics in Millington. Upon completion of training and ready for his first overseas tour in 1972, he was told he had two choices – Vietnam or Thailand.

“I said I didn’t care, send me where you need me,” said Purvis. “I’ll go where I’m needed and they sent me to Thailand.”

He was sent to MAG15 (Marine Air Group) as an avionics mechanic, based in Nam Phong, Thailand..

“We were bombing Cambodia from Thailand and I worked on radar systems on the F-4 Phantom II,” he said. “I was at Nam Phong, although we called it the Rose Garden, after that song, ‘I never Promised You a Rose Garden,’ because we were right in the middle of the jungle.”

After Purvis’ unit ceased operations in Thailand, he was sent to the Philippines, Okinawa and Japan for several months each to complete his overseas tour.

Upon his return stateside, Purvis, a recognized expert in his field, was sent back to NAS Millington, but this time as an avionics instructor. He taught at Millington until he was honorably discharge from the Marine Corps as a Staff Sergeant in 1978.

After his discharge, Purvis moved to Memphis where he found employment with FedEx using the skills he had gained in the service and worked there as an avionics mechanic for 18 years. A visit to Fernandina Beach, Fla., convinced him he needed to be living on the beach and so he moved and enjoyed that life for 15 years before realizing that he wanted to spend his retirement years in Munford. He returned to Tipton County in 2012.

“When I got ready to retire, I started thinking back on all the places I had lived and realized Munford was it. I like this part of the country and I missed my friends.”

Kathy Desjarlais, the 2015 Chairman of the Tipton County Veteran Council, read Purvis’ certificate of honor, “It is with heart felt appreciation for your tireless efforts in support of our United States military, the Tipton County Museum, Veteran Memorial and Nature Center in partnership with the Tipton County Veterans Council gratefully acknowledge the selfless service of our veteran of the month for August 2015.... Your dedication to our country is commendable and an honorable addition for the fight for freedom throughout the world.”

“Thank you for the kind words,” Purvis told the crowd. “What I like to say is this recognition is special to me. We didn’t get it when we came back from overseas. We got treated pretty harshly and with disdain. You kind of kept your service to yourself, but the way our country is treating our veterans today makes me really proud of our country. My being recognized 30 years later is pretty cool. Thank you all, I appreciate it.”

Purvis received a certificate of honor in recognition of his service, a Museum coffee mug and a certificate for a free portrait from Munford Funeral Home.

The monthly event is co-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, the Disable American Veterans Auxiliary in Millington and the Dunham Lodge 150. The next honoree will be named on Tuesday, Sept. 8 at 6:30 p.m. The public is invited to both make nominations and attend the ceremony.