

Victor Johnson honored for service in Vietnam

By Sherri Onorati, Special to The Leader

Covington native Victor Johnson was recently honored as the June Veteran of the Month by the Tipton County Veterans Council at a ceremony held at the Tipton County Museum, Veteran Memorial and Nature Center in Covington.

Johnson was nominated Covington District 1 Alderwoman Minnie Bommer, who told those gathered for the recognition ceremony that "Victor grew up here and he makes us all proud all the time and we are really glad to have him back in Covington. I am proud of you Victor and I was so pleased to do the nomination and so overjoyed that they selected you. If anyone deserves it, you do."

Following in the footsteps of his father, William A. Johnson, who served in WWII, Johnson, a 1975 graduate of Covington High School, joined the U.S. Army on August 17, 1975, just after the Vietnam War ended.

Setting a personal goal to complete 20 years, Johnson worked hard to do just that. Serving during the Cold War meant he spent the majority of his tours in and about Germany providing tactical contingency communications to European Command (EUCOM) and NATO missions within the EUCOM and United States Central Command (CENTCOM) areas of operations. He also served as a battalion maintenance supervisor and took those skills to Iraq during Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm where he was responsible for the training, welfare, professional development, discipline and combat readiness of 63 soldiers under his command.

While in Iraq, his quick thinking, response and medical skills were instrumental in saving the lives of two soldiers during Operation Desert Storm. For his fortitude, commitment and valor during his two-decade career, he was awarded numerous commendations including, two Meritorious Service Medals, four Army Commendation Medals, two Army Achievement Medals and six Army Good Conduct Medals. He was also awarded several service and campaign medals including a National Defense Service Medal, an Army of Occupation Medal, a Southwest Asia Service Medal with three Bronze Service Stars, a Kuwait Liberation Medal, an Army Service Ribbon and four Overseas Service Ribbons.

Not one to sit still, Johnson went right back to work after retiring from a successful military career as a Sergeant first class (E7), working as a machine operator for Lydell Manufacturing and as a line technician for Unilever, both in Covington. He also became a licensed real estate agent for Tate Realty in Memphis.

Johnson is a member of Canaan Baptist Church in Covington, where he serves as a deacon and he is the proud father of four children and equally proud grandfather of 13.

Kathy Desjarlais, president of the Tipton County Veterans Council, read the certificate of honor given to Johnson for his selection as the June Veteran of the Month.

“It is with heartfelt appreciation of your tireless efforts in support of our United States military, 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,” read Desjarlais. “Your dedication to our country is commendable and an honorable addition to the fight for freedom throughout the world.”

In addition to the certificate of honor, the Tipton County Veteran’s Council presented Johnson with several awards for his many years of service, including a years membership in the Tipton County Veterans Council, a certificate for an 11x14 canvas portrait given by Munford Funeral Home, a flag flown over the state capitol signed by the governor and given by District 81 State Representative Deborah Moody and a proclamation honoring his service, signed by Beth Harwell, Tennessee Speaker of the House and Representative Moody.

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.

“I really appreciate the honor,” said Johnson. “During my 20 years in service I really enjoyed the military, but you remember that movie, Private Benjamin? That’s how they got me,” he added to laughter from the audience, explaining that after high school a slick talking recruiter told him and a group of friends that they wouldn’t have to cut their hair and if they got tired of being the military they could just leave and go home.

“This guy was talking this line for about 30 minutes and said why don’t we just take the test and see how we do. So the next day we went to take the test and out of 10 guys, only two passed the test, me and Tony [a friend]. Then he asked us where we wanted to go to boot camp? We’d never been out of Tipton County, so he said, 'How about California?' and we thought that was fine. Good, you’re leaving tomorrow, he said,” remembered Johnson to more laughter.

Johnson said, although he may have started his time in the military a bit naive, he readily enjoyed the educational broadening and seeing the world.

“In Germany, I was at Bamberg, Berlin, Stuttgart and Frankfurt. Being overseas really was a learning experience.... going to Berlin and seeing the [Berlin Wall] and then seeing it torn down was an experience,” he said.

He said that the life lessons the military taught him made him appreciate what he does have.

“One life lesson the military taught me was patience,” he added. “Enjoy life because life is not promised. God is always first in everything that I do and being in the war and seeing death and destruction, but knowing that God will carry me through it, meant a lot to me. I’d like for young people, to try to get closer to God and to put God first in their lives. They can accomplish anything if they put God first.”