



Remembering Our Own

In memory of PFC Roger Downey

A World War II soldier who lost his life in support of the famed Battle of the Bulge was memorialized near his childhood home. Family members, friends and others from the community gathered on Rt. 49 near Mills in Harrison Township to dedicate the Private First Class Roger P. Downey Memorial Bridge, which carries traffic over a branch of the Cowanesque River. PFC Downey left Harrison Valley High School early to join the Army in 1944.



Among those attending the bridge dedication were, from left: Rep. Martin Causer; Sharon Downey, PFC Downey's sister-in-law; his sister, Doris Downey Kelly; Chuck Dillon of Sen. Joe Scarnati's office; and Berwyn Calcote, commander of Carl E. Hyde American Legion Post 963 of Ulysses.

In January 1945, he and his unit were sent to reinforce and relieve units engaged in the Ardennes Forest of Belgium, Luxembourg and Germany. He was killed in action in Germany on March 9, 1945.

More than a year ago, officers of Carl E. Hyde American Legion Post 963 of Ulysses began a campaign to have the bridge declared a memorial for PFC Downey. Post Commander Berwyn Calcote spearheaded the effort. Letters of support were submitted by the Potter County Board of Commissioners and the Harrison Township Board of Supervisors. State Representative Martin Causer shepherded the legislation through the Pa. General Assembly, in coordination with Senator Joe Scarnati.

Bridge will memorialize Lt. Daisley

Coudersport's Toles Hollow Road bridge over the Allegheny River has been named the Lt. William E. Daisley Jr. Memorial Bridge, following an act of the Pa. General Assembly. Daisley was an outstanding scholar, role model and athlete at Coudersport Area High School. He graduated with high honors from the U.S. Naval Academy.

In March 1993, he was taking part in a training exercise off the coast of North Carolina, and his F-14B Tomcat fighter plane never returned. The wreckage was discovered later that day about 20 miles east of Nags Head, but his remains were not recovered. LCDR Fred D. Dillingham also perished in the crash.



National recognition for Potter County!

Potter County has received a national excellence award for its services to military veterans, under the motto, “No Veteran Left Behind.” The honor was presented during the National Association of Counties (NACo) Annual Conference in Charlotte, N.C. Potter was the only Pennsylvania county to be recognized. Entrants for the NACo Achievement Awards must meet rigid standards demonstrating innovative thinking, excellence in administration, demonstrated positive impacts and other criteria. This year’s honors are a first for Potter County. An outline of Potter County’s “No Veteran Left Behind” initiative will now be circulated by NACo across the nation as a recommended model for county-based solutions.



Worthington

Among the elements are a stronger partnership with the Bath (N.Y.) VA Medical Center for expanded services at the VA Clinic in Coudersport; an award-winning newsletter and related programs to honor veterans and inform them of available benefits and services; successful veterans recognition programs that included a sold-out Korean War Veterans Recognition Dinner and several bridge dedications honoring war casualties; services provided to individual veterans by Potter County Veterans Affairs Director Will Worthington; and Potter County Commissioner Paul Heimel’s advocacy for veterans and military families through leadership positions with both NACo and the County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania.

In announcing the awards, NACo President Riki Hokama said, “We applaud Potter County for embracing innovative and more effective ways to serve constituents. The Achievement Awards recognize counties’ outstanding efforts to strengthen services and deliver results for residents across the country.”



Heimel

Among speakers at the NACo Annual Conference in Charlotte was U.S. Defense Secretary Ashton Carter, who called on counties to partner with the VA and other federal agencies to help veterans who are transitioning back into their communities. Secretary Carter also met separately with members of NACo’s Veterans and Military Service Committee.



NACo President Riki Hokama (left) welcomes U.S. Defense Secretary Ashton Carter to the national conference in Charlotte, N.C., where the focus was on community partnerships to help veterans.

Commissioner Heimel, who is the committee’s vice chairman, said the panel is now seeking a face-to-face meeting with U.S. Secretary of Veterans Affairs Robert McDonald to support a platform that calls for:

- Bringing veterans access to more timely and more convenient (closer-by) health care through partnerships with non-VA medical providers.
- Reduced barriers to veterans' civilian employment in both the public and private sectors through greater recognition of skills that are learned in military service.
- Federal funding to help support county-level veterans' service officers.
- A crackdown on fraud that victimizes veterans, current service members and their families, or solicits on their behalf.

Traveler's message: 'honor our veterans'



Residents across much of Potter County did a double-take a few weeks ago as a lone traveler made his way through the region with a large, mule-drawn covered wagon.

He is Charlie Peters, a 70-year-old Vietnam War veteran and retired machinist, who has spent three years crossing much of the U.S. with a homemade wagon pulled by two mules. As the large red, white and blue banner on his wagon's side suggests, Peters embarked on his trek to remind Americans of the service and sacrifices made by military veterans.

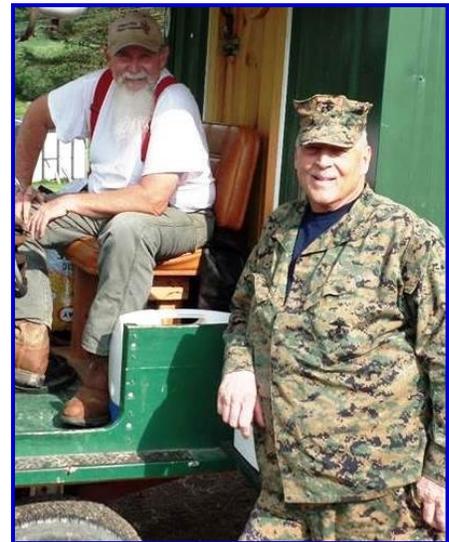
The Navy veteran retired after working for many years as a machinist at a General Motors production plant in Michigan. In 2013, he set out on a 1,100-mile journey to Oklahoma to visit his father's grave for the first time.

That gave Peters a lot of time to think about his country and the bond he felt with other military veterans. The cool reception that he and countless other Vietnam veterans experienced when they returned from the war had gnawed at him for decades.

He decided that he would remain on the road indefinitely, going out of his way to greet other veterans and thank them for their service, while proudly displaying his prominent banner. It's a slow trip that averages only about 20 miles a day. Many days it's less than that, because Charlie admits he likes to talk to people.

"I usually try to make 20 miles. Some days I do and some days I don't. It just depends. I can make more if we don't have a lot of hills," Peters said. "I like to stay at fairgrounds or parks, but sometimes people stop and ask me if I want to stay at their place. People have been fantastic. I knew they would be nice, but I had no idea they would be this nice." His routes avoid urban areas and concentrates on two-lane highway often through rural countryside.

Charlie's mission almost ended in 2013 when a teenaged driver who was texting on a mobile phone crashed into his wagon. One of his mules was killed and Peters himself was injured. Weeks later, he was back on the road.



Charlie Peters, a retiree from Michigan, wants to draw attention to the service and sacrifice of military veterans as his mule-drawn wagon criss-crosses the nation. Among those he met with as he passed through Potter County was former U.S. Marine Dick Darrin.

ODDS 'N ENDS

Housing assistance for veterans



Veterans who are homeless, or who are at risk of becoming homeless, can get help through a new program serving Potter, Cameron, McKean and Elk counties. A \$200,000 grant is fueling the two-year Emergency Solutions for Veterans Program. Details are available locally from the Potter County Department of Veterans Affairs. Call 814-274-8290, extension 210. Veterans could be eligible for help with past-due rent payments, security deposits, short- or medium-term rental assistance, and case management services. Services are available regardless of the veteran's discharge status.

Leaders of American Legion Post 192 in Coudersport turned out in full force to express their opposition to a proposal to relocate the Military Wall of Honor established by Post 192 at the Coudersport Arboretum. A neighboring business approached Coudersport Borough with a proposal to buy the parcel along South West Street and relocate the wall and other features of the arboretum to alternative locations. Responding to the outcry from Post 192 and others, Borough Council unanimously voted to reject the offer.

Protecting wall of honor



Potter County Veterans News is a publication of the Potter County Veterans Affairs Department. Copies are available for download from the county's website, pottercountypa.net. For more information, contact Paul Heimel at 814.274.8290, Ext. 203.