



VFW Post 1308 salutes area veterans; remembers Russell Dunham

November 11 2014 8:30 AM

Every year on Veterans Day, as nearly a right of passage, the Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 1308 in Alton hosts a 10 a.m. ceremony in memory of all those who have served their country.

For VFW Post1308 commander Harry Kortkamp each year it is a very special time.

“We have a ceremony, we have guest speakers and we talk about our veterans, either right outside the Doughboy Statue in front of the post or inside, depending on the weather. It is always a good ceremony.”

At 2 p.m. there is a potluck dinner and people are invited to hear music with Steve Cline at 3 p.m. and celebrate with our veterans.

Each year, a brief moment of tribute is given to Russell Dunham, a Medal of Honor recipient, who was raised in Fosterburg, and a longtime post member.

Dunham, a sergeant in the U.S. Army, was a Medal of Honor recipient for his actions on Jan. 8, 1945, in Kayserberg, France.

During the action, Dunham killed nine Germans, wounded seven and captured two on his own. Nearly 30 other Germans were captured as a result of his actions.

When Dunham was presented with the Medal of Honor, Gen. Alexander Patch said as he placed the award around Dunham's neck that his actions in single-handedly destroying the machine gun nests saved the lives of 120 U.S. soldiers who had been pinned down.

For his injuries on that day, Dunham also received the Purple Heart. Shrapnel from his injuries remained in his body for the rest of his life.

On Jan. 22 after his wounds had healed, Dunham returned with his battalion and it was surrounded by tanks, forcing most of the men to surrender. The following morning, two German soldiers discovered Dunham hiding in a sauerkraut barrel outside a barn. When their search of his pockets turned up a pack of cigarettes, they fought over it, overlooking his pistol in a shoulder holster. Later that day as he was being transported toward German lines, the driver stopped in a bar, giving Dunham the opportunity to shoot his other captor and set off toward the American lines. Dunham suffered severe frostbite while completing his escape.

Dave Stout, a longtime member of the VFW post, said today will be an emotional day for those who have served.

“It is a remembrance of all the veterans, but more for our past veterans than us today,” he said. “It’s a day we look forward to every year. Other American Legion posts show up here and the Marine Corps League will also be here.”

The post is located at 4445 Alby St. in Alton. For more information, contact Becky at 618-466-6883 or e-mail willb4255@yahoo.com. The public is invited to the event and potluck along with all veterans.