

# Veterans honored as heroes at annual Alton VFW service

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Veterans were honored as heroes Tuesday in a patriotic Veterans Day service at Alton Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 1308.

“Our veterans fought on battle fields across the world to protect our freedom,” said Army Capt. Richard Star, who experienced the horrors of war in Iraq and Afghanistan. “Many of our servicemen sacrificed their lives so we could be free.”

Star, the main speaker, was applauded for his tribute to veterans at the gathering of people in the auditorium of the VFW post on Alby Street in Alton.

Alton Mayor Brant Walker stood in front of the flag and read a proclamation honoring veterans.

A feeling of patriotism filled the hearts of people who stood with their hands over their hearts to pledge allegiance to the Old Glory. An old Navy veteran saluted the flag and wiped tears from his eyes.



Soldiers followed the Stars of Stripes on the battlefield of all the wars, said Jack Fessler, 84, quartermaster and 60-year member of VFW Post 1308.

An eight-foot long flag flies in the breeze on top of a 30-foot pole 365 days a year in the front yard of Fessler's home. At night the beauty of the red, white and blue glows in the beams of a giant spotlight, Fessler, a Marine veteran from Korea, said.

At the Vet's Day service a World War soldier who fought at the battle of the Bulge stood next to a veteran who was wounded in battle of Bloody Ridge in Korea War. Veterans of Vietnam, Gulf War, Iraq and Afghanistan shared stories of their experiences in the war. They remembered Russell Dunham, a member of Post 1308, who earned the Medal of Honor as one of the great heroes of World War II.

A Veterans Day service is normally held at the foot of the World I Doughboy Statue and outside the VFW. The service was moved inside in the wake of a light rain and 30 mph winds.

Capt. Star, the main speaker, a former Army officer is assigned to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in St. Louis. He recalls when his Army unit was mobilized to go to Desert Storm. "It was my first reality of war," he said. "I saw enemy tanks and equipment scattered everywhere."

Gold Star Mother Lynn Linker, Post 1308 Commander Harry Kortkamp and Auxiliary President Karen Curry placed red, white and blue wreaths at the foot of the flag.



Vietnam veteran Art Moore, 68, of Godfrey, stood with the VFW Ritual Team dressed in their marching uniforms. The Ritual Team has been recognized across the country and leads the annual Memorial Day Parade in Alton.

On his uniform, Moore, a VFW service officer, wears a Purple Heart for wounds in Vietnam with the Ninth Calvary Unit. Moore and the members of the Ritual Team raised their rifles and fired a volley of three shots to honor veterans who have died in the battlefields.

Ritual Team Capt. Tom Asbury prays at the funeral of veterans. “Sadly our Ritual Team has presided at 108 funerals for veterans in 2014,” he said. Asbury was a rifleman with the First Infantry Company in Vietnam and did three tours of duty in the battlefields of Korea. He wears the “Combat Infantryman’s Badge and a Purple Heart on his uniform.

At the close of the Veterans Day service, a gathering of people bowed their heads and listened to a recording of a bugler play the mournful sounds of taps. Tears filled the eyes of Asbury when the soft musical tones filled the air.

“When I hear the taps, it brings back memories of the days on the battlefield,” Asbury said. “I think of my buddies who died in battle.”

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