

MARTINSVILLE BULLETIN

Service honors veterans



At top, David Kipfinger (from left) James Rogers and Curtis Millner Sr. are shown with the awards they received Sunday. Above and at right, Command Sgt. Maj. Russell Wilder addresses the crowd at the National Guard Armory.

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By AMANDA BUCK - Bulletin Staff Writer

Three local veterans received special recognition Sunday at the annual community Veterans Day service, which drew a crowd of more than 200 people.

James Rogers, a veteran of World War II and Korea and former Henry County sheriff; David Kipfinger, a Vietnam veteran and commander of the Martinsville-Henry County Veterans Honor Guard; and Curtis Millner Sr., a Vietnam veteran and member of the Henry County School Board, received awards.

Rogers and Kipfinger were the first recipients of the Outstanding Military Veteran award, an award created this year by the Henry County Board of

Supervisors. It is designed to recognize a veteran for community service as well as military service.

Debra Buchanan, supervisors chairman, presented the award. "This is the first year for this new county award, and the response was incredible," Buchanan said. "We had so many excellent nominations, we truly struggled with which person to recognize. So, for our first year, we want to recognize two of them."

Kipfinger, who helped organize Sunday's service, said he had no idea he would be honored. "It was an absolute, total surprise," said the Mountain Valley resident. "It's an absolute honor." Kipfinger said he is proud the county will be recognizing more veterans with the award, which is planned to be given annually. In addition to his work with the honor guard, Kipfinger, 62, is senior vice commander of American Legion Post 42, vice president of the Horsepasture Ruritan Club and former commander of VFW Post 2820 in Bassett.

During his Army service, Kipfinger received the Bronze Star and Purple Heart, among other honors. Rogers, 84, said he too was surprised to hear his name called. "I'm very humbled," he said. "It's a total surprise to me. I never expected something like this." Rogers, a Collinsville resident who served in the Marine Corps for 22 years, also received the Purple Heart and Bronze Star. He was a member of the Martinsville Henry County Veterans Honor Guard for 17 years, is a past commander of VFW Post 4637 and is a member of Disabled American Veterans Chapter 52, American Legion Post 11 and the Marine Corps League Edward W. Richardson Detachment No. 908.

Millner was named Veteran of the Year, an award presented each year at the event. The recipient is chosen by a committee of the three most immediate past recipients and the year's keynote speaker. Millner, 67, served in the Army for 23 years, retiring as a chief warrant officer three. In addition to Vietnam, he served in Germany, Thailand and Guatemala, as well as several domestic posts. Millner, who lives in Axton, also received numerous awards, including the Vietnam Cross of Gallantry with Palm and the Army Commendation Medal (three oak leaf clusters).

He taught JROTC in the county schools for six years and is involved in numerous area organizations, including the NAACP, American Legion Homer Dillard Post 78 and past president of FOCUS on Youth. Millner thanked the awards committee for honoring him and all the veterans for their service. Before the award recipients were named, keynote speaker Command Sgt. Maj. Russell Wilder (retired), who is senior Army instructor for the JROTC program at Bassett High School, spoke about the sacrifices made

by the nation's veterans.

He said he often asks young people to name their favorite things to do. Do they like going to school, hanging out with friends, playing sports? Maybe it's dating or cruising in their cars. Whatever the answer, Wilder said he tells them, "Everything you do, thank a veteran." Wilder, who grew up admiring his father and other relatives for their military service, said the sacrifices of veterans and their families took on a new meaning for him when his own children began shipping off to war. Three of his seven children, as well as his son-in-law, are in the service now, some of them in Iraq or Afghanistan. "I used to watch my babies and my wife cry when I would deploy," Wilder said. "But until you've watched your child walk down (toward an airplane) the last time and turn to wave at you ... it's a revelation." Wilder said he received a call Sunday morning before the ceremony from his son Jake in Iraq. The younger man wished his dad luck and asked him to send a recording of the speech if one was made, Wilder said.

To have a child overseas "getting shot at" call and wish him luck puts things in perspective, Wilder said. "Your whole life transforms and changes," he said. Wilder and Maj. Rick Adams were recognized for their work with the JROTC program, Wilder at Bassett and Adams at Magna Vista High School. Lt. Col. David King, who led the program at Martinsville High School until it was disbanded last year, was unable to attend but sent comments expressing his thanks.

Numerous other speakers thanked area veterans of conflicts ranging from World War II to the war on terror for the sacrifices they have made in the name of freedom. Jerry Perdue, who led the invocation, also led the crowd in observing a moment of silence for the victims of the mass shooting last week at Fort Hood, Texas, the nation's largest military installation. Thirteen people were killed and 29 wounded when an Army psychiatrist allegedly opened fire there Thursday.

Bassett High School's JROTC led the presentation of colors, and Christopher Turner, a member of Magna Vista's JROTC, led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Veterans Day officially will be observed Wednesday. Several smaller events are planned in the area.