

# MARTINSVILLE BULLETIN

## Area soldiers always ready to fulfill duty

Friday, November 11, 2005

By DEBBIE HALL - Bulletin Staff Writer

From a foxhole in Iwo Jima to the skies over the desert of Iraq, local veterans recall some sacrifices they made in the military but say, if needed, they would do it all again.

"I have no regrets," said Franklin County native James "Swanson" Rigney. Now 80, Rigney was wounded when a mortar shell landed beside him in a foxhole in Iwo Jima.

He was blind in both eyes for the next two months and later lost his right eye and ear. But he is thankful to have escaped with his life.

"If my country needed me today" and he was physically able, "you bet I would" do it all again, Rigney said.

Rigney enlisted in the Marine Corps in 1944. By February 1945, he joined 5th Shore Party on Iwo Jima on Red Beach 2 with E Company, 2nd Battalion, 28th Marines, 5th Division.

Although warfare has changed in the 60 years since then, Rigney said both veterans and active servicemen "should be respected and praised" for their efforts.

"Things ain't free. Somebody pays for it," Rigney said. Troops "over in Iraq are paying now."

Henry County native Arnold Prillaman also answered the call to duty in World War II, where he served in the Eighth Air Force as a B-17 gunner and flew out of England and over Germany.

Prillaman "only flew 30 missions," he said, rather than the 35 he was supposed to fly, because of a hospital stay.

Still, "we averaged flying about every third day," he said.

Prillaman recalled one of the "worst things" about his stint in the military was the harsh winter weather in 1944. "It was one of the worst winters Europe had had in 100 years." While the "number one" danger was anti-aircraft fire, the weather ran a close second, he said. Airmen flew in non-pressurized planes and wore heated suits "to keep from freezing to death."

"I suspect (servicemen) of today felt the same as we did. They're facing (many of) the same hazards," Prillaman said, adding that regardless of branch, length of service or other particulars, each is owed a debt of gratitude.

Lt. Col. Rich Berglund retired from the Army in 2004 after serving more than 20 years. Berglund, now in his mid-40s, served in conflict zones or "hot spots" in the Mideast, Balkans and Central America.

It was an education he will not forget.

"In all the conflicts, just going and seeing how other people live" makes him more appreciative of the U.S. and veterans of past conflicts, he said.

"I think that as Americans, we need to appreciate what our veterans have done," Berglund said, adding there is no way to adequately thank World War II veterans for their efforts.

"They made the world safer when they defeated Nazism," he said.

Younger service men and women also deserve gratitude, he added.

"The war on terrorism is and will be fought by our young people," Berglund said.

Dave Chandler, 41, recently retired as a chief warrant officer 3 after spending more than 20 years in the Army.

He served during Operation Desert Storm and most recently in Iraq, but "I've been everywhere ... Bosnia, Afghanistan, the

Philippines. I think just seeing how the rest of the world is compared to how we live here is probably the biggest benefit."

Older veterans, such as Prillaman and Rigney, inspire Chandler because "I think they have taught us how to function so that we are better."

Younger veterans, as well as active personnel, may benefit from Chandler's advice. "Be trained. Always be prepared and do the best you can with what you have," he said.

Jacob Hubbard, 24, an E-5 specialist with the National Guard, spent a year in Ghazni, Afghanistan, performing duties similar to those of a law enforcement officer.

"It was like being a cop over here. You never know what's going to happen. You just hope you're a better shot than the other guy," Hubbard said.

From his experience, Hubbard said he knows what other members of the military go

through when stationed away from home.

"I missed my kids a lot," he said. "That was the biggest thing about it ... Being away from my kids and everything."

Veterans of past conflicts, but especially World War II, "deserve a heartfelt thank you. They had it a lot harder than we did," Hubbard said.

Still, he would serve again, if needed.

Doug Perry, 34, is a 15-year veteran of the National Guard who served as a specialist during Desert Storm and a staff sergeant in Iraqi Freedom.

World War II, Korean and Vietnam veterans were among the first in line to shake his hand when he returned from Iraq "and their support has just been incredible," Perry said.

Perry said he will return to active duty whenever needed and "I guess I really don't consider myself a veteran ... I'm not done yet."

He is proud to be part of something that is bigger than a single individual, adding that from the first settlement at Jamestown "all the way through U.S. history," service personnel have played a vital role in helping form the country.

Perry appreciates the contribution of each individual, but said actions speak louder than words, especially for students.

"The best way to thank a veteran is to take advantage of all the good things we have to offer here in the United States," he said, adding that education, serving the community and striving to "always do your best" are worthwhile goals for anyone. "Succeed. Make something of your life. That's the best way to honor a veteran," Perry said. After all, he added, the freedom to pursue those important dreams "is what it's all about."