

July 3, 2017

I recently returned from an event in Sacramento honoring a veteran from each of the assembly districts in California. This year our Assembly Member, Jim Wood choose my Father-in-law, Tom McMahon to be the Veteran of the year for district 2.

This was the 10th year for the event, which has honored hundreds of veterans for their sacrifices for our country and state. Members from each branch of service were honored, which included a photo with their assembly member on the assembly floor, a resolution from the state assembly and a luncheon

The luncheon was sponsored by numerous veterans groups, which included The American Legion, AMVETS. Association of County Veterans Services, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Vietnam Veterans of America along with numerous other trade organizations and companies.

Veterans in attendance represented wars and conflicts our country has been involved in since WW II including the Korean War, Vietnam War, Gulf War, the cold war and our current conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan.

My Father-in-law Tom McMahon was 17 when he enlisted in the Army/Aircorp and served as a tail gunner in a B-17 flying fortress. He was shot down and spent his 18th birthday in a POW camp. Tom escaped a few times and worked with the French underground before being recaptured. He was liberated

by the Russian army and eventually returned home to a family who believed he had died when his plane went down.

When my wife and I went to the event we thought Tom would be the oldest honoree at 92 years old. To our surprise we sat with a veteran from WW II who was involved in the invasion on D-Day and the liberation of concentration camps at the conclusion of the war. This great veteran was 102 years old and was extremely sharp for his advanced years.

They called those who answered the call during WW II the greatest generation for a reason. I grew up on the stories and concerns of those who served, my father was a B-17 pilot during the war and both he and my Father-in-law may have crossed paths during that tumultuous time in history.

Men and women have answered the call to service throughout the history of our country and deserve our respect. Regardless of the conflict or if their service was during peacetime each one knew the price they could possibly pay to keep the freedoms we enjoy today. So let's not forget our veterans, their service and sacrifices for our freedoms. This has been Mike Downey for Community Comment.