



The 2013 Tournament of Roses Parade

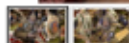
Department of Defense 60th Anniversary Korean War Commemoration Committee

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WASHINGTON POST

Pentagon to debut float in Rose parade to commemorate Korean War vets 60 years after armistice



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By Associated Press, Published: December 31

SAN DIEGO — It's been almost 60 years since James McEachin returned home with a bullet still lodged in his chest, finding an America indifferent toward the troops who fought in Korea. Now he will get the homecoming parade he had expected.

The Defense Department for the first time will put a float in Pasadena's Tournament of Roses — one of the most watched parades — to commemorate the veterans from a conflict that still casts a shadow over the world.

"I think it's a magnificent gesture and it cures a lot of ills," said McEachin, who will be among six veterans who will ride on the float Tuesday. The 82-year-old author and actor starred in Perry Mason TV movies, among other things.

The \$247,000 flower-covered float will be a replica of the Korean War Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C.

The Pentagon's debut comes ahead of events marking the 60th anniversary of the July 1953 armistice that halted the bloodshed but did not declare peace.

Col. David Clark said the Pentagon decided to seize the opportunity to sponsor one of the 42 floats in the 124-year-old New Year's Day parade to raise awareness about what has been called "The Forgotten War."

It has taken decades for the success of the war's efforts to be recognized, and the department wanted to remind Americans about the sacrifices that were made by the veterans, most of whom are now in their 80s, Clark said.

The war resulted in South Korea developing into a thriving democratic ally in sharp contrast to its bitterly poor, communist neighbor that is seen as a global threat.

"As a nation, this may be our last opportunity to say 'thank you' to them and honor their service," said Clark, director of the department's 60th Anniversary of the Korean War Commemoration Committee.

The war began when North Korea invaded the South to try to reunify the nation, a liberated Japanese colony sliced in two in 1945 by the U.S. and Soviet victors of World War II.

North Korea had the upper hand at first, almost pushing a weak South Korean-U.S. force off the peninsula, but then U.S. reinforcements poured in and pushed them back.

Then, in late 1950, communist China stepped in and the Americans and South Koreans were forced back to the peninsula's midsection. The two sides battled there for two years before ending with a stalemate.

"We didn't march home in victory. We did what we were supposed to do, which is stop this aggressive force called communism," said McEachin, a Silver Star recipient.

Edward Chang, director of the Young Oak Kim Center for Korean American Studies at the University of California, Riverside, said U.S. intervention gave South Korea the opportunity to become a democracy. The government did not talk to troops at the time about how pivotal the war was in stopping communism. After the victory in World War II, the Korean conflict seemed to almost provoke shame for Americans, McEachin said.

The American public also felt no connection to the fighting in a faraway Asian country unlike during World War II when airwaves filled with patriotic fight songs, he said.

McEachin not only returned to indifference but discrimination as an African American soldier.

After the plane carrying returning troops was delayed in Montana by snow, he was turned away from a hotel where his fellow white soldiers were staying.

Korea was the first conflict in which all U.S. military units were integrated racially. Clark said the float's veterans reflect that important historical milestone.

Clark said it's important Americans learn the war's history because the problem is ever present, a point driven home by the heavily mined armistice line, a 4-kilometer-wide (2.5-mile-wide) demilitarized strip stretching 220 kilometers (135 miles) across the peninsula.

"This serves as a reminder that there is unfinished business on the Korean peninsula," he said.

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Los Angeles Times

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Float remembers U.S. vets of 'forgotten war' in Korea

The Korean American community helps decorate the float in honor of veterans' sacrifices in the 1950s conflict.

January 01, 2013 | Sandy Banks

Byoung Baek flew out from Rochester, N.Y., on Christmas Day for the Rose Parade. But she didn't come for the weather or the revelry or the spectacle.

She traveled to Pasadena to pay a debt she has owed for 60 years.

Baek was a youngster in South Korea when American troops helped preserve her fledgling nation's sovereignty by repelling communist-backed invaders from North Korea.



Byoung Baek, center, greets Col. David J. Clark, left, as volunteers decorate... (Gary Friedman / Los Angeles...)

The war would last three years, from 1950 to 1953. Baek and other Koreans, children during the war, would spend decades steeped in its legacy.

"Our parents always talked about it," recalled Baek, 65, a registered nurse who moved to America 40 years ago. "They appreciated the [veterans'] sacrifice, their dedication to fight for our freedom."

So when Baek heard that this year's Rose Parade would include a float honoring Korean War veterans, she organized her Korean American friends in Los Angeles and arranged to help with the decorating.

They gathered on Friday morning in a chilly Pasadena armory; senior citizens gluing rose petals, beans and eucalyptus leaves to a float commemorating a war that holds more meaning for them than it does for most Americans.

Korean War veterans "are the reason we are here," said Agoura Hills resident Mary Han, who emigrated from Seoul 20 years ago. "They are like our fathers, our uncles.... We should always honor them."

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That's a sentiment the veterans haven't heard much in the years since the war ended.

Ask most Americans what they know of the Korean War, and you're likely to get a blank stare in return.

In American history classes, that messy conflict is mostly treated as an afterthought. It lacked the global reach of World War II and the public angst of Vietnam. In fact, it wasn't even officially called a war; it was a "police action" from the outset.

The U.S. was one of 16 nations fighting for South Korea under the United Nations' banner. But it was our country that did the heavy lifting, supplying 90% of the effort's military power.

More than 33,000 Americans died in three years of combat in Korea — almost five times the number of U.S. troops lost in 12 years of war in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Yet, "people didn't know what we were doing there," said Minoru Tonai, who was a UCLA student when he was drafted in 1950 and sent to the front lines in 20-degrees-below-zero weather. And "nobody paid attention" when Tonai, an Army sergeant, returned home.

Now, 60 years later, the Department of Defense is trying to rectify that.

"The Rose Parade is the heroes' welcome these veterans always deserved and never got," said Army Col. David J. Clark, who mingled with volunteers and veterans at the decorating session Friday.

Tonai, of Woodland Hills, will be among six veterans riding on the float. The other locals are former Army 1st Lt. Solomon Jamerson from West Los Angeles, who was awarded a Silver Star for gallantry, and Encino's James McEachin, an Army sergeant when he was wounded in an ambush and earned a Silver Star and a Purple Heart.

McEachin is an actor now, better known for his TV roles on courtroom shows and private eye dramas than for his military stint. "But there's never been a greater honor for me than to say I served this country," he said.

And representing his comrades in the Rose Parade? "It doesn't get any better than this."

There was more hugging and picture-taking going on than decorating when I stopped by the float Friday morning.

With the Korean American contingent according them rock-star status, the elderly veterans — wearing shiny boots and freshly pressed uniforms, with medals and ribbons pinned to their chests — drew a steady stream of strangers offering thanks.

I was embarrassed, as I listened to their stories, to realize how much I didn't know. They were young men who had signed up or been drafted, never imagining they would go to war. They survived unimaginable horrors and came home to silently shoulder the burden of what is still nicknamed "the forgotten war."

Many were unwitting pioneers, the first minorities to fight in our country's newly integrated armed forces.

"We wound up integrating the barracks in Korea," recalled McEachin, who had been assigned at enlistment to an all-black regiment. "There was lots of tension.... It was hard on all of us. But once we got into the trenches, you didn't see color, you didn't think color. We were all just soldiers."

For many, the war was an abrupt shove from adolescence to manhood.

"Nobody even knew where Korea was," said Robert Castillo, who was born in East L.A. and enlisted because the vets returning home from World War II "looked so good with their shiny boots."

"It seemed pretty exciting at 19," he said. Castillo thought he would wind up on a military base in Germany or Japan. Instead, he parachuted behind enemy lines in Korea, where he earned a Bronze Star and a Purple Heart for bravery.

PASADENA STAR NEWS

http://www.pasadenastarnews.com/rosebowlparade/ci_22159740

Actor, Korean War veteran James McEachin soldiers on for veterans

By Brenda Gazzar, Staff Writer twitter.com/bgazzar Pasadena Star-News

Posted:

PasadenaStarNews.com

James McEachin has worked beside such legends as John Wayne, Bette Davis and Sidney Poitier.

He became the first African-American man in 1973 to have his own show on NBC, "Tenaflly," a detective series about a police officer turned private eye. He went on to star as police Lt. Brock in several Perry Mason TV movies.

But despite having more than 150 film and television credits to his name, McEachin - a decorated Army veteran who fought in the Korean War - would much rather be remembered as a soldier than an actor.

"There have been some incredibly gifted actors that have come along the pike over the years, and it's hard to say this, but I don't think you can ever say they made the contributions that the soldiers made," said McEachin, 82. "I don't think that you can put them in the same category as a Gen. Patton, Marshall, Lee, Grant and Schwarzkopf."

A recipient of the Silver Star and Purple Heart for his service in Korea, McEachin is among the six Korean War veterans slated to ride on the Department of Defense's Rose Parade float on Jan. 1. The float will commemorate the 60th anniversary of the signing of the armistice that halted the hostilities.

Since most Korean War veterans are today in their 80s, "this may be our last opportunity to say thank you for what they did for us 60 years ago," said Col. David J. Clark, the director of the Department of Defense's 60th Anniversary of the Korean War Commemoration Committee.

The Korean War was the first war in which U.S. forces were fully integrated, and its veterans include Japanese-Americans, Korean-Americans, Latinos, African-Americans and Native Americans. They "were every bit as heroic as their white brethren," although their stories weren't told at the time, Clark said.

McEachin joined the Army in August 1947, when there was strict segregation between black and white soldiers. He remembers a first sergeant, a light-skinned black man named Harry L. Myles, being very concerned about race, ordering them to make their all-black regiment proud.

"(He would say) 'you will uphold the tradition of the colored people. You will soldier like you've never soldiered before in your life. We will outdo the whites,'" McEachin recalled.

Many years later, McEachin - also an award-winning author - based the protagonist of his second novel, "Farewell to the Mockingbirds," on Myles, whom he called an "amazing human being."

McEachin spent more than two years in Japan and then returned to the U.S. to finish his three-year service term. He was discharged a day before the Army froze all discharges because of a "police action" that broke out in a strange and far-away place. Feeling left out, McEachin immediately re-enlisted for another three years.

"I thought it was an insult; they had this whole war going on and I wasn't invited to attend," he recalled.

Although the Army wanted him to be an engineer or a clerk, McEachin insisted on going to Korea and eventually made it to the front lines as part of the 2nd Infantry Division.

One night, he was seriously wounded in an ambush by the Chinese and left for dead. After waking up in a creek some time later, he heard the voice of an American that belonged to "a German-looking white boy" - the only other man in his squad to have survived the attack.

McEachin didn't know the man's name but said it was like Jesus himself had come to rescue him. Despite McEachin's wounds, the blond soldier carried his wounded colleague for many miles - even while dodging mortar rounds - to get to safer ground. McEachin was sure the soldier was going to cut his losses and drop him at some point, but he never did.



James McEachin, actor, author, former Korean War veteran who will be riding on the Department of Defense's float in the Rose Parade this year, talks about his near death experience in the Korean War Wednesday, November 21, 2012 at the Valley Inn in Sherman Oaks. (SGVN/Staff Photo by Sarah Reingewirtz)

http://www.pasadenastarnews.com/rosebowlparade/ci_22159740

They finally found a place in the rushing stream where the two men could safely cross to the American side. McEachin was sent to Japan to be treated for his injuries and then found his way to the front lines of Korea once again.

He had hoped to find the young man who saved his life, to say thank you and recommend him for a medal, he said. Although he casually asked around, he wasn't able to locate him or learn much about him.

After returning to the U.S. a short time later, McEachin worked as a firefighter and then a police officer in Hackensack, N.J. He also worked in the music industry for several years before being spotted on Melrose Avenue by a script writer and landing a role in his first film, "I Crossed the Color Line."

Besides being an author, McEachin developed a one-act play about veterans called "Above the Call; Beyond the Duty," which debuted at Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C., and which he performed around the country. He also performs short, first-person dramatic presentations about the veteran's experience.

In fact, he said, he would love to perform one during halftime of the Rose Bowl Game on Jan. 1.

"You know, our children don't know anything about veterans," McEachin said. "They don't know the feeling or the empathy of some old veteran that is probably homeless today or could be homeless ... My job now, at this late stage of my life, is to speak on behalf of them."

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