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MCFARLAND

American Legion honors Krenz

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Darrell Krenz sits with his wife Marchita during the Sept. 23 ceremony to honor him for his contributions to the Legion Post 534. Krenz served in the Korean War and spent the majority of his time in Prisoner of War camp. H

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When Darrell Krenz returned from the Korean War to his home in McFarland, the first thing he did was hug an American flag pole.



“I hadn’t seen it in three-and-a-half years,” said Krenz, who spent that time in a North Korean prison camp where every day, he didn’t know if he was going to survive.

Fortunately, he did. When he returned to McFarland, he became an instrumental figure in the construction of the war memorial located about 100 feet south of American Legion Post 534 in McFarland.

Krenz and his wife Marchita encouraged businesses to donate money and much of the work was done by the Legion members. A total of \$186,000 was raised to make Krenz’s dream – and the dream of other Legionnaires – come true. The memorial was finally dedicated on July 5, 2005.



Krenz was honored last week in an informal ceremony at the memorial. At age 89, he can’t walk very well, but family and friends were able to get him and Marchita to sit on one of the marble benches as Legion commander Tom Downs read a dedication to Krenz and his hard work.

It was an honor that Krenz truly deserved, after what he went through in Korea and the horrors he witnessed.

A childhood kiss

Krenz was born and raised in McFarland. He first met Marchita when they were young children. Her father worked as a farmer’s helper and young Darrell would visit frequently to see her three brothers. One day, he invited Marchita to go on a bike ride along Lake Waubesa.

“He took me out for a bike ride, tipped me over and kissed me,” said Marchita, who was 13 at the time. Krenz was 14, but that kiss was a prelude to the future.

Krenz attended Madison East High School for two years and rode his bike from McFarland every day to class.

“My father didn’t have a quarter for me to ride the bus,” he said.

When he was 17, Krenz dropped out of high school and joined the Army just as the tensions between North Korea and South Korea were starting to build. The U.S. entered the conflict to protect South Korea from their communist neighbors to the north.

Krenz’s three other brothers were members of the Armed Service, and he felt it was his duty to join.

Shortly after he was shipped to Korea, Krenz’s unit was attacked by North Korea. Only three of the 36 members of the platoon, including Krenz, survived. After that, he was among 800 American soldiers sent to a prisoner-of-war camp.

Every day was a grim battle for survival as the North Koreans would indiscriminately kill the prisoners. Day after day, Krenz never knew if he was going to survive or be terminated.

By the time the Korean War ended, 247 of the prisoners were still alive. Krenz is one of 30 survivors still living today.

“I always said I’m not going to be buried in Korea,” said Krenz, who still feels the pain of that horrible experience.

Back in McFarland

When he returned home, Krenz worked for more than 40 years installing Otis Elevators.

“I was in vertical transportation,” he said with a chuckle.

He also found out Marchita was still not married.

“He wanted to go someplace quiet and talk. He hadn’t been home long,” she said. “We started dating and all of a sudden, we were married.”

Krenz and his bride have been together for 66 years. They had four children, and have 17 great-grandchildren.

“I still try to remember all their names,” he said.

After more than six decades together, Krenz and Marchita, now residents of Madison on the McFarland border, can look back with pride on how they contributed to the war memorial. It’s a perfect testimonial to those who served their country.

Marchita, who will soon turn 88 years old, said her husband has had nightmares about his days in Korea, but his situation has improved.

“He’s a lot better,” she said. “He talks about it a lot and that gets it out of his system.”

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