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We Shall Not Forget
Service continues after his time in the military

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McFarland's Dale Sankey entered the Army at age 18 (at left) and prepared in a National Guard unit in preparation for riots. Now 62, Sankey services as the local Legion's chaplain.

Contributed photos

Dale Sankey was 18 years old when he decided to join the Wisconsin Army National Guard. A recent high school graduate, he joined the local National Guard unit in Stevens Point in 1970. For the next six years, in a time of civil unrest, Sankey trained to prepare for potential riots.

“We did all the riot training so we could come to Madison,” Sankey said.

Sankey – now 62 and a McFarland resident – decided to join the National Guard because his older brothers had enlisted – one in the Navy and the other in the Army. “It was a military family,” he said.

The Stevens Point location was an artillery unit. Sankey was in charge of a M109A1, a cannon on treads resembling a tank. He moved to the position of sergeant by the end of his six years of service.



His time in the National Guard was very rewarding as a way to serve God and his country. When Sankey thinks about being a veteran, it was part of fulfilling his service to the United States.

Sankey never had to help control any riots, but was called up for the Keshena Abbey takeover. The Jan. 1, 1975 incident involved an armed group called the Menominee Warrior Society that seized the property while taking the caretaker and his family hostage.

The National Guard moved into the area and sealed the property off at several checkpoints. There were accounts of vigilante activity and several surrounding communities that did not want the National Guard in the area. This, along with gunfire exchanges, made for a hostile situation.



The standoff finally ended on Feb. 2, 1975.

Sankey's unit was also called to Fox Lake Prison during the 1970s during the state's public employee strike. The National Guard was put in charge of one of the facilities' buildings.

He said going to the stand-off and the prison was "like walking into a different world. You go from your private life to a life of unrest."

His reason for leaving the National Guard was because he began transferring locations for work. Sankey spent 46 years in the retail grocery business. Now retired, he spends two days a week babysitting his first grandchild.

After serving in the National Guard, Sankey continued to serve others. He's been a member of the Knights of Columbus for 25 years and held an officer position for several years. The veteran was on the board of directors for Green Bay's Marion House, which offered transitional housing for single teenage mothers.

"Then I got involved in the Cub Scouts and the Boy Scouts," Sankey said. His son made the rank of Eagle Scout. "So that was kind of like being back in the military," he said with a laugh. "It was fun without the danger."

And for the past eight years Sankey has been a state ombudsman, making a weekly nursing home inspection for a location in Madison.

The veteran, who has lived in McFarland for nine years, joined the local American Legion post in December 2014. "I had some extra time now that I'm retired," he said.

Sankey was recently voted as the post's chaplain.

"It was a pretty big honor," he said. "And I think a lot of my visiting at the nursing homes is what set me up for that. Because you learn how to do a lot of listening."

As chaplain, Sankey is responsible for performing at a post member's funeral, sending out donations when a post member dies, mailing cards when someone is ill, and being available to any local Legion members if they want to talk.

And for those still serving in the military, Sankey offers these words: "We all can protect our family and friends by letting them know we are praying for them."