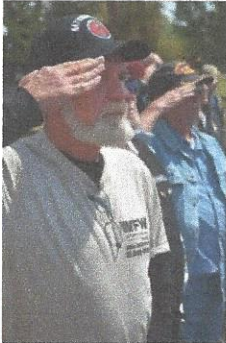


## Vietnam vets, advocates mark anniversary in Aiken

By Bill Bengtson [bbengtson@aikenstandard.com](mailto:bbengtson@aikenstandard.com) March 31, 2023



Warrenville resident J.D. Tucker, an Army National Guard veteran who served in Iraq, was on hand Wednesday for the national anthem's playing at the Vietnam remembrance event held at Aiken County Veterans Memorial Park.

A major anniversary in U.S. military history helped set the stage for a Wednesday ceremony at Aiken County Veterans Memorial Park, with dozens of veterans and others gathering to mark 50 years since the end of U.S. combat operations in Vietnam.

The featured speaker was North Augusta resident Dennis DuPuis, an Army National Guard veteran who was deployed twice to Vietnam and was largely known for his service as an Apache helicopter pilot. His Vietnam record included 1,155 combat flight hours, and by retirement, he had four years of active duty and 31 more with the S.C. National Guard Reserve. Recognition included the Legion of Merit, Distinguished Flying Cross (on three occasions) and a Bronze Star among his mementoes.

DuPuis touched on the meaning of the National Vietnam War Veterans Day, and recalled that appreciation of veterans became more visible in the aftermath of the Gulf War and the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001.

The historic importance of March 29, 1973, he noted, was the result of negotiations between the U.S. and North Vietnam, leading to an agreement for the U.S. to remove combat troops from Vietnam and send them home, in exchange for the release of U.S. prisoners of war in Vietnam.

The Aiken event itself was unique, as the first Vietnam remembrance ceremony held at the site since the memorial monument was moved from its former site on Laurens Street, near the post office. Sponsorship was by Vietnam Veterans of America Chapter 1145 (established in 2022) and Daughters of the American Revolution Trenton Chapter (1911).

Among DuPuis' listeners was Warrenville resident J.D. Tucker, an Army National Guard resident who served in Iraq. "Couldn't be any better," he said, when asked about Wednesday's gathering.

"This is something that has been coming for a long time for Vietnam vets. I enjoyed it, and I'd like to see more," he said, citing his own involvement as a member of Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 10601, and the group's efforts to have more such events.

"I had a brother that served in Vietnam, in the Navy, and a good friend of mine was a first lieutenant in the 82nd Airborne that served in Vietnam, so I grew up during that era," he said. "I had some first-hand experience and conversations ... with veterans for years. Dad was a World War II veteran, so it's kind of a family thing now."

The event also included Mayor Rick Osbon's presentation of a proclamation to "recognize and honor all those who served in the Vietnam war, to proclaim March 29 as Vietnam War Veterans Day in the city of Aiken and encourage all residents to extend heartfelt appreciation to our Vietnam veterans and their families for their service and sacrifice."

Among other prominent participants was Aiken County Veterans Council Chairman Lowell Koppert, an Army combat veteran. He expressed particular appreciation for several men who were on hand for the event and had traveled from Augusta, where they are receiving treatment for spinal-cord injuries at one of the city's two Veterans Affairs hospitals.

"I'd like to thank all of you for your service, and I appreciate you coming ... from the VA over in Augusta to spend your afternoon with us ... As you can imagine, it's probably no easy task getting these gentlemen over here, so I'd like to thank the ladies and the one gentlemen that brought them over," Koppert said.

The monument at the center of Wednesday's event was relocated partially as the result of a 2021-22 legislative effort in Columbia. It won final approval April 4, 2022.

The bill read, in part, "The Aiken County Council and the Aiken City Council are authorized by the General Assembly to proceed with appropriate ordinances to designate an entity to transfer the Vietnam War Memorial, eternal flame, and United States flag installations from the corner of Edgefield Avenue and Laurens Street, North West, in Aiken, South Carolina, to the Aiken County Veterans Memorial Park located at 1435 Richland Avenue, East, Aiken, South Carolina, 29801."