

VFS honors 100-year-old World War II veteran

BY STEVE MCBRIDE
Contributing Writer

It started out as a beautiful May spring day outing with the family in Independence when Dale Barnard, age 100, of Coffeyville, was suddenly surprised as his family ushered him to the Veterans Freedom Square at Riverside Park to be honored with a paver engraved with his name to be placed among the many other veterans from Montgomery County who have served their country throughout the history of its military conflicts.

After the COVID-19 pandemic halted celebrating Bernard's 100th birthday, his cousin, Patty Riffe, of Independence, began the process of finding a way to have a paver placed at Veterans Freedom Square. "I came out and visited VFS and thought, 'how nice it would be if Dale had a paver here,'" she stated. Soon afterward, she contacted Kathy Shepard and asked who she should contact about arranging to get a paver placed. She was instructed to contact Ron Lawrence, coordinator of VFS, and he informed her of how to order one. "I then informed Ron that it was not going to be a memorial because he is alive and what would be the chance of him installing it?" It was determined Barnard could do that if he wanted to. Lawrence also arranged for the American Legion to get involved, along with the VFW and the American Legion Riders. "It just kind of grew into a patriotic appreciation day for Dale," said Riffe. Of course, the whole event was kept a secret from Barnard. "He had no idea this was going to happen," Riffe said with a smile.

Barnard is a very special veteran and person as he served in the National Guard and US Army as a veteran who is now 100 years old and still going strong. Though he never served overseas during WWII because of a devastating injury sustained while in training, he served his country with distinction and honor.

Born Nov. 28, 1920 in Independence, Barnard was raised in Coffeyville before joining the military in 1938. "Coffeyville had the 114th National Guard horseback Cavalry Unit. So, me being a lover of horses, I had to join the Army to get closer to horses," he said. By the 1940s, the world was headed into another world war. "In 1941, they mechanized us into an artillery unit.

Just before the war broke out, the country, in an effort of defense against German bombers, instituted a nationwide blackout. Cities and towns across the land were to turn off all lights in order that if German bombers were to invade the country they could not be guided by the lights. It was during this time that Barnard was stationed in Arkansas and part of the Tennessee and Louisiana maneuvers. Because of the blackouts, the military also had to comply with the order to run convoys without lights, which led to many devastating accidents injuring and killing many soldiers. "Little did the public know or realize what that meant or know what was happening," said Barnard. It was in Prescott, Ark. during a blackout maneuver with trucks full of soldiers and equipment that would be moving as fast as they could without lights, that Barnard was injured.

"There was always a long string of trucks and jeeps hauling or towing all kinds of equipment. When one vehicle would stop in the front, the others would pile up behind it, causing huge accidents," he stated. This practice caused a massive amount of accidents. "As fast as they were going and

trying to stop and just couldn't with all the weight they were hauling. They were turning the trucks and cars over and throwing soldiers out or trapping them in the vehicles. I've seen several trucks that were turned over with men pinned underneath the truck. So many that I saw of this. There was no reason it was to have happened," exclaimed Barnard. He tells of how all the hospitals, schools and schoolyards were turned into emergency hospitals full of injured soldiers whose injuries were the results of these blackout accidents and, in his words, "useless wrecks."

According to Barnard, no one across the country seemed to know about these incidents or what was going on. "It was like they were covered up and history has covered it up and I want to see that everyone knows what happened to their loved ones and the truth about what was never told," stated Barnard strongly.

Barnard himself suffered severe injuries when he was thrown from an Army truck and run over his upper torso and shoulder. He spent many months in the hospital and endured several operations. He felt the Army's resolve was to attempt to drum out as many of the injured soldiers so they wouldn't have to pay compensation but that didn't work with Barnard. He figured out they were trying to get him out when they indicated they were going to try a new process by replacing a bone with a goat bone. When he agreed to do the operation, the doctors balked and he was eventually given an honorable discharge but it only classified him as 30% disabled when, in fact, he should have had a 100% disability.

At the time of Barnard's stint in the Army, he felt it was completely unprepared to meet the challenge of the war. Though industries were building military equipment to be sent overseas, the military personnel was not properly trained for the day America would eventually enter the conflict. He spoke of being issued a uniform that would fit a man twice the size of him, to the outdated equipment soldiers were issued to train on. "They were not ready for the war. It was no wonder things happened as they did," said Barnard.

After his discharge, Barnard left the military and became an electrician CFCA (CO-OP) in Lawrence. He retired in 1978 and began to live, he said. He bought a fifth-wheel camper and truck and began to travel between his home in Lawrence and South Padre Island, Texas for the next 18 years.

He has also been very involved in raising miniature ponies (Shetland). "Back in the 1950s, the pony business was big business. You could get any amount of money you wanted to back then. When you drove down the highway, you would see signs advertising the pony farms where people could go see and children could ride the ponies. They were everywhere," said Barnard.

The circus always intrigued Barnard and he was determined to build a miniature circus wagon his ponies could pull. "I wanted a circus wagon so bad so I contacted a close friend of mine who owned the circus wagon museum in Sarasota, Fla. I went to talk to him about how to make a wagon," he said. Barnard finally built his own wagon with all the harnesses and ornate decorations of a full-size circus wagon.

In conclusion, he stated, "I have got more and been given more extra time by the good Lord and I appreciate this life I have been given and I love sharing it with others."

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HONORED VETERAN TURNS 100 — Dale Barnard, of Coffeyville, lays a paver in his name with the help of Ron Lawrence, VFS coordinator, at the Independence Veterans Freedom Square at Riverside Park.



VETERAN SURPRISED BY FAMILY WITH A PAVER IN HIS NAME - I to r- Fred and Rhonda (daughter) Meafoos, Dale Barnard (Veteran), Teresa Miner (daughter) and Patty Riffe (cousin).

