

Smith County to dedicate monument to combat veterans

Dedication ceremony is Sunday, May 26

Monument sections expected to arrive and be installed Thursday, May 23

May 21, 2002

A memorial to combat veterans of four wars will be unveiled Sunday, May 26, at the Smith County Courthouse in Raleigh. A ceremony is scheduled for 2 p.m. on the courthouse lawn.

The names of every Smith countian who fought in World War I, World War II, the Korean War and the Vietnam War will be carved in two sections of a gray granite wall about seven feet tall. A third section centered between the two name-bearing walls will contain language honoring their service. The monument will measure about 60 feet long with each name inscribed in letters about an inch and a quarter tall.

Dedication ceremony speakers include Former Raleigh Mayor Paul Thompson and former Smith County Chancery Clerk and legislator Lamar Moss, both World War II combat veterans; John B. Russum of Burns, a Korean War combat veteran; and John Adcock of White Oak, a Vietnam War veteran. Guests include former Gov. William Winter and Elbert Hilliard, director of the Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

The sections of carved granite are expected to be delivered to Raleigh and put in place on Thursday, May 23. The street in front of the courthouse is expected to be temporarily blocked to accommodate two 18-wheelers and a crane.

Key Blair of Columbus Marble Works designed the monument. It was produced by Columbus Marble Works.

Raleigh attorney Gene Tullos researched the historical information and paid for the monument. He asked that the cost not be made public.

Tullos said, "I was able to do it, and the main thing I was interested in was that I wanted to preserve their names. Hopefully 150 years from now, if somebody's great great grandchild wants to go and look at it, it will be at the courthouse."

Tullos assembled a list of Smith County war veterans because no complete list existed. He used records from military discharge books kept by the chancery clerk and read old editions of the *Smith County Reformer* newspaper. He interviewed hundreds of veterans and their family members. He ran advertisements in the *Smith County Reformer* seeking information, in case he had missed some names. More names were added in response to the ads.

Tullos noted that space remains on the walls to add more names, in case others were missed. He invites anyone who knows of an omission to contact him at his office in Raleigh.

The wall will contain about 1,840 names and denote those who died, those who were wounded and those who were prisoners of war. They include about 240 who served in World War I, 1,200 who served in World War II, and 200 each from the Korean and Vietnam wars. Combat casualties include two in World War I, 60 from World War II, four in the Korean War and three in the Vietnam War, Tullos said.

Perspective: the 1940 census showed Smith County's population numbered 19,403.

Circuit Judge Robert G. Evans of Raleigh said, "We need to remember them. If it wasn't for what these men and women did, we wouldn't be here to have such a ceremony. It's important to remember from whence cometh our freedom. It was the everyday people of Smith County and of Mississippi and the country who gave us freedom of speech and freedom of the press and such as that."

Evans said Tullos has made significant contributions to preserving the county's history.

"He's like a one-man historical preservation committee," said Evans. "Without him, the county's history and contributions to the state would likely be forgotten. He's an invaluable resource for knowledge, and certainly this gesture on his part shows his deep respect and honor for those who went before."

Local history is Tullos' passion. His collection includes between 5,000 and 6,000 pictures of Smith County people.

His roots are entwined in local politics. Three earlier generations of Tullos' relatives include four Smith County sheriffs, a county supervisor, a circuit clerk and a chancery clerk. His father was Smith County Chancery Clerk.

"I've heard politics and history of Smith County as long as I can remember," said Tullos, 60. "I've always been really interested in history, primarily Smith County history, and as a country lawyer, you had better know the genealogy of those jurors when you go up to the courtroom."

Three of Tullos' father's cousins died in combat in World War II - David Tullos on Okinawa, Charles Thomas Jones on Iwo Jima and Prentiss Tullos in Germany.

Two years ago, Tullos completed a collection of photos of Smith County men and women who died during military service from World War I through the Vietnam War. The more than 60 photos, which cover a wall in the Smith County Courthouse in Raleigh, trace the county's sacrifice in human lives. The photo gallery was dedicated on May 28, 2000.

Mention a name or a face from the collection, and Tullos supplies the military service and family history. He has spent the past four years researching records, talking to local veterans and their relatives and tracking down those he didn't know. A widow's maiden name and the fact that her father lived in Clinton and owned an ice factory was his starting point for locating the widow in North Carolina and obtaining a photograph.

Tullos said collecting photos of those who died in war was part of the bigger project to document the military service of every Smith County combat veteran from World War I through the Vietnam War. He has photos of about 800 combat veterans. Those pictures will surround the walls of the monument during the ceremony on Sunday.

There's not a public accommodation large enough to display all of the photos permanently. That's another project in the works for Tullos. He hopes to one day build a museum to house historical collections for Smith County.