

PLEASE REMEMBER
By Ch (COL) Larry McCarty

The Year was 1976. My brother and I were at the fourth of July celebration in my home town of St. Augustine, Florida. The highlight of the celebration was the Bicentennial Parade. This was to be a grand parade honoring our Nation's 200th birthday. As the parade line formed up I could see it would be a big one. There were marching bands and plenty of floats. There were also representatives from all military services and veterans from World War One, World War Two, Korea and Viet Nam.

Mr. Kuhlman was the lone Combat Veteran from World War One. I knew Mr. K well because he was a neighbor. He was an old man (in his 70s) and somewhat feeble. He came to the parade that brutally hot July morning wearing his full dress wool uniform. Mr. K was supposed to lead the parade. He was to ride in a jeep and wave at the crowd. Mr. K refused to get in the jeep. He told the Parade organizers that he would not ride. He was going to march. Even though I was just a teen I knew he was making a bad decision. The man was too old and the day was too hot.

The organizers tried to talk him out of marching but to no avail. The siren sounded, the parade began and Mr. K led the way. My brother and I were compelled to follow him. Off he marched but after the first mile Mr. K began to wobble. I pushed my little brother out to him. "Offer him a coke, tell him to take a break", I cried. Mr. K kindly refused the drink and kept marching. The day grew hotter and hotter. Mr. K began to limp but still he kept moving. Finally it happened! As Mr. K rounded the corner on the home stretch of the parade route, he stumbled and fell. He hit the ground hard. He tore his pants, skinned up his hands and banged his head on the pavement. Several folks ran to his aide. We were determined to pull him off the road where he could rest in the shade. BUT Mr. K slowly and surely got back on his feet. He pushed the crowd away. Refusing to quit he marched on.

The parade concluded at the National Guard Armory. A few politicians spoke and then there was a flag raising ceremony. As Old Glory was raised and the Star Spangled banner played Mr. K popped to attention and saluted the flag. As I watched him salute, I saw the tears streaming down his face. After the service I walked up to Mr. K and I asked him why he refused to ride in the jeep. I told him I was concerned that he was going to have a heat stroke. Mr. K looked me in the eye and spoke a word to me that literally changed my life. He said, "Young man, I walked for those who could not. I marched for those who have paid the ultimate price for our freedom". He took his finger and lovingly but firmly poked me in the chest and said, "Freedom is a light for which many men and women have died in darkness. And the price of freedom is so high that it can only be paid for in blood." Then with tears in his eyes he said "Please remember, because people tend to forget." And then the Old Soldier slowly but proudly limped away. I have never forgotten!

May we never forget!

"The patriot's blood is the seed of Freedom's tree." Thomas Campbell

"For God and Country"

LARRY A. McCARTY