



American Legion Colorado District 10, Post 143, Bayfield CO

Record of Sapp Family Memorial Event - June 5th 2021

Letter from Mike Mullins, Post 143 Adjutant, event organizer, to post members:

Hello Everyone,

I would like to remind everyone that tomorrow, Saturday the 5th of June, we will be dedicating a plaque at the grave of a long-forgotten Korean War veteran named Harold Daniel Sapp. Dan, a life-time Bayfield resident, managed to survive being a pole lineman for almost a year and a half in Korea, only to be killed in a head-on collision with a drunk driver in 1960 near here. His grave has never had anything showing he was a veteran, much less a war veteran. Tomorrow, we right that wrong. He has family coming in from out of town, and I would like to have a big showing from American Legion Post 143. We will be making him an honorary member of the post as well. If you can, please take a few moments out of your Saturday morning, and help us honor this war veteran.

For those of you who have already committed to help, thanks. The dedication will take place at 10:00am, Saturday, June 5th, at the cemetery at Elmore's corner (NOT THE BAYFIELD CEMETERY). If you are helping me with the ceremony, or would like to help with the ceremony, please be there by 9:30. Anyone who is part of the color guard, please wear your color guard shirt and ball cap.

Thanks,

J. Michael Mullins, Adjutant

On May 1st, 1953, SGT Harold Daniel (Dan) Sapp was separated from the U.S. Army after serving a year and five months in Korea, at the height of the Korean conflict. SGT Sapp had been a pole lineman in the war, an extremely hazardous job, fraught with the danger of sniper attacks and ambushes. After his exemplary service, as evidenced by his rapid rise from Private to Sergeant, he was finally going back home to Bayfield, Colorado where he would settle back into his life as a farmer, and start a family. He got married and had two beautiful daughters. Sadly, in 1960, Dan and his wife were killed in a head-on collision with a drunk driver. Fortunately, his daughters were with a babysitter. The girls were taken in by family members, and Dan and his wife were quickly buried in a family plot near his home. In the dark days following his death, and the confusion and uncertainty as to what to do with his children, no one really thought about the fact that Dan had honorably served his country. Nothing at his gravesite or on his modest headstone reflected the fact that Dan was a veteran. Over sixty years later, that would change.

Dan's nephew, Lew Sapp, served our country in the Navy during the Vietnam era, and for many years after his discharge, on Memorial Day and Veteran's Day, he would visit the cemetery where his uncle was buried, only to see Dan's grave without an American flag, or any other form of recognition for his service. Lew was determined to change this. In 2015, he began a six-year journey through piles of paperwork and government red tape, never dreaming how difficult his task would be. The county veterans service officer gave him a list of things he would need, including a DD-214. After many failures, Lew was able to secure a copy thanks to Dan's great grandson, a Desert Storm veteran. Lew was told he also needed a death certificate. This proved to be even more difficult to obtain. In 2019, while compiling all of the paperwork needed for a death certificate, Lew and his family were in a head-on collision with (ironically enough) a drunk driver. His family survived, but all of the paperwork Lew had assembled burned up in the wreckage. At this point, Lew had to concentrate on his, and his family's, recuperation. He had pretty much given up hope that he could secure some form of recognition for his Uncle Dan.

In the late summer of 2020, Lew met Mike Mullins, the adjutant of American Legion Post 143, in Bayfield, Colorado. Mike informed Lew that the county had a new veterans service officer, and told him not to give up hope. This could be done. With renewed hope, Lew went back to work collecting documents and filling out paperwork. His problems were compounded by COVID, and the closing of many of the offices that could help him. Finally, in early 2021, there was a breakthrough. Lew retired in Cortez, Colorado, not far from Durango. The veterans service office in Montezuma County was able to help track down Dan's DD-214, and a plaque was ordered and received. Lew took the plaque to Mike Mullins, who had promised Post 143 would arrange a ceremony to formally dedicate the plaque, and finally give SGT Harold Daniel Sapp the recognition he deserved. What happened next can best be described in Lew's own words, taken from a thank you letter sent to American Legion Post 143, in Bayfield:

“On June 5th, after 60 years and 6 months, my Uncle Dan was presented with his own plaque.



The Bayfield American Legion held a beautiful ceremony with prayer, a history of what Uncle Dan’s company went through in the war, and the plaque was uncovered by his two daughters, Pat and Phyllis. Approximately 20 to 25 family members were in attendance. My cousins and our families were finally able to attend the funeral we never got to attend in 1960. As Uncle Dan’s oldest daughter Pat said at the dedication, ‘thank you for allowing me to finally have closure.’ I would like to thank all the veterans from the American Legion Post 143, Bayfield, Colorado, who helped with the ceremony. My memory for names is gone, but your faces are all familiar to me. A special thank you to Mike Mullins for the beautiful work, and especially for not letting me give up.”

Now, and forever, on Memorial Day and Veterans Day, an American flag will be placed at the grave of SGT Harold Daniel Sapp, a nearly forgotten hero from a forgotten war.



American Legion Bayfield Post 143 Vice Commander, John Jarret, also serving as the local VFW District Chaplain, reads a commemorating poem, as Post 143 member Dan Percel serves as Color Guard for the Army Flag, in Honor of Sgt Sapp's Army service in the Korean War.



Post 143 Adjutant & event organizer, Mike Mullins, dedicates Sgt. Sapp's new plaque as the Post Chaplain, Bob Pope looks on.



The new plaque is uncovered by Sgt. Sapp's two daughters, Pat and Phyllis as Post 143 Color Guards Tim Lovejoy, Sgt. At Arms, and Dan Percel look on.



Post Commander, Tony Shrier, presents Pat and Phyllis with a certificate awarding SGT Sapp an honorary membership in American Legion Post 143, Bayfield, Colorado.







Navy veteran Lew Sapp (back left) poses with family members.

Submitted by Tim Lovejoy, Colorado District 10 Historian, Bayfield Post 143 Sgt. At Arms 8-24-2021