

Bill and Mendia Patton Patriotic Award

A History

By: David Patton, Palmer Town Historian



The winners of the Tenth Annual Bill and Mendia Patton Patriotic Award at Grundy County High School are pictured with award founder David Patton on Veterans Day 2014. Pictured from left to right are: Dr. David Dickerson (Director of Schools), Shelby Comer (3rd Place), David Patton (Founder), Kaitlin Sons (2nd Place), Halie Monroe (1st Place), and Ms. Beth Brown (Junior English teacher).

It all started when I got to know Mr. Y.B. Ashby, probably around 1986 or 1987, when he began the *Grundy County Post* newspaper. We became friends and I wrote all kinds of articles for the paper and loved talking with him since he was a World War II Veteran and interested in all things patriotic.

Mr. Ashby grew up in Texas and went to high school in the Houston area during the Great Depression of the 1930's. He told me that the American Legion sponsored a Patriotic Speech Contest at the school on Armistice Day (now called Veterans Day). The winner was awarded a \$5 gold piece, which was a lot of money during those hard times.

The story stuck with me and I thought what a great thing something like that would be for Grundy County High School. I never dreamed I would someday have that opportunity, but believe you me, when that door opened, I didn't walk through it, I ran through it!

In 2005, Dr. David Dickerson was the Grundy County Director of Schools. When I contacted him about my idea he was very interested. Talk about good timing, as it turned out all juniors at the school were already required to write an essay and this was done in the fall. So, instead of a Patriotic Speech Contest, we decided to have a Patriotic Essay Contest and announce the winners on Veterans Day.

On Veterans Day 2005, the following gathered in a small conference room at Grundy County High School to honor the first recipients of the Bill and Mendia Patton Patriotic Award, which is named in honor of my parents. The recipients; Courtney VanHoosier, Angela Borne, and David Smith, were joined by Dr. Dickerson, David Patton, Y.B. Ashby (who judged the contest and chose the winners), Joe Willard Fults and wife Ima Jean (he spoke to the students about joining the Navy at age 15 in 1943 and his experiences in World War II), Janelle Taylor, and Willene Campbell from the Grundy County Historical Society, and Roger Morgan from the *Grundy County Herald*, who had a photo of the group and the winning essays in the paper.

Since this is a milestone year in the history of the award, let's look back and give you a complete listing of the winning recipients.

2005

- 1st Place – Courtney VanHoosier
- 2nd Place – Angela Borne
- 3rd Place – David Smith

2006

- 1st Place – Haley Stocker
- 2nd Place – Kayla Childers
- 3rd Place – A.J. Rooker

2007

- 1st Place – Laura Parson
- 2nd Place – Kendra Wetherington
- 3rd Place – Amber Mayhew

2008

- 1st Place – Cassandra Gunn
- 2nd Place – Laura Smartt
- 3rd Place – Chastity Garner

2009
1st Place – Lacey Smith
2nd Place – Shelbe Campbell
3rd Place – Magan Coffelt

2010
1st Place – Erica Green
2nd Place – Lacey Pickett
3rd Place – Canyon King

2011
1st Place – Cassie Shrum
2nd Place – Angel Schild
3rd Place – Kierra King

2012
1st Place – Tim Johnson
2nd Place – Colton Morgan
3rd Place – William Tyler Land

2013
1st Place – Aaron Gross
2nd Place – Harley Meeks
3rd Place – Alex Gross (Aaron and Alex are twins)

2014
1st Place – Halie Monroe
2nd Place – Kaitlin Sons
3rd Place – Shelby Comer

When this award began in 2005, the stated purpose was “to foster, among the student body and general public, a deeper appreciation and understanding of our United States Military Veterans and the sacrifices they have made to preserve our freedom and the American way of life”. To my amazement and delight, that purpose has more than been realized.

Reflecting back on these ten years, I have been so blessed to receive one-hundred percent cooperation from the Grundy County School officials. A sincere thank you to the Directors of Schools Dr. David Dickerson, Joel “Jody” Hargis, and Clay Newsome. The help of those in the central office has been invaluable and we appreciate them so much. They include Phyllis Gulley, Renea Barton, and Shelly Meeks. The Supervisors of Instruction have helped in every way and a tip of the hat to Donna Layne, Dr. Russell Ladd, Dr. David Dickerson, and Samantha Stevens. And finally, we are so grateful for the assistance of the principals at Grundy County High School including Ken Colquett, Dr. William Childers, Rick Rust, Amanda Lance, and Jamie Ruehling. We gratefully acknowledge the assistance of Shelly Meeks in bringing you this story. We could not have done it without her.

2007 1st Place Winner, Laura Parson

“Veteran’s Day is a day where we remember all the men and women who have fought for our country. Without all of them we might not have been living in a free country today.

I know a veteran personally. He is my great uncle. He fought in World War II. He was taken and dropped out of an airplane into the jungle with a gun and told to kill. My uncle was still very young at that time.

He’s told me some of the stories. Some of the things he went through were horrible and no one should have to face it. But he did and because of him and all the other brave men and women I am allowed to live in a free country today.

When my uncle tells his stories about the war he always starts to cry because one thing he has always said is that he never wanted to go to war but because he loved his family and the country he lived in, he had to fight for it to keep it safe and free. To me that is showing patriotism and love for his country.”

2007 2nd Place Winner, Kendra Wetherington

“November 11th the day when all around the world men and women who have served our country are recognized. On that very day of every year all service men and women of all branches are honored for everything they have done to defend and protect our nation. Soldiers who have fought in the war, sailors who have protected our bodies of water, and Coast Guardsmen who have defended our nation's borders are gathered together to repay their thanks to our veterans.

Veterans of America are brave people who have sacrificed their own lives so that we Americans can be free. The courageous men and women that have sacrificed their lives can never be thanked enough. Ceremonies and prayers are great reminders of what they have done for us but never enough to pay them back for the ultimate sacrifices they have made.

Homer Layne, one of many veterans of America, is just one man who made the sacrifice to fight for our nation. Homer is one of the more fortunate veterans whom didn’t lose their life in battle. Homer will always keep with him the great courageous feeling of helping his

homeland. He is very thankful to have been one of the few veterans who made it home safe.

Like most all veterans still living, Homer shows his patriotism by helping whenever he is needed to defend our country again. He has been honored with a purple star which reminds him of how thankful he is to be alive and free due to all the brave men and women who lost their lives defending the United States of America.”

2007 3rd Place Winner, Amber Mayhew

“On Veteran’s Day everyone needs to stop and take a minute to remember those who have fought for our freedom and those who are fighting for our freedom now. These men and women put their lives on the line for us so we can have what we want in this country.

I think sometimes people forget how much our veterans do for us and all of the sacrifices they actually make. These people go months or even years without seeing their family. All so their family can live a free lifestyle.

My grandfather is veteran of the Vietnam War. He risked his own life for the lives of others. We need to remember little things like that. These days people are so wrapped up in things and are so greedy. One little thing may not go their way and they think it’s the end of the world. They never stop and think about the soldiers and things don’t always go their ways.

My grandmother’s first husband was killed in the Vietnam War. He stepped on a land mine and it blew him up. They had been married exactly one year when it happened. People never think about families losing their loved ones in the war. They never think about kids losing their parents.

That’s why this Veteran’s Day we need to remember all who have served for us and pray for the ones who are serving now. Keep them in our thoughts and prayers. We need to pray for their families and help them make it through tough times.”

2014 1st Place Winner, Halie Monroe

“America, the Land of the Free, pays a price every day for her freedom. A price that can’t be paid in money but rather in hard work, determination, and sacrifice. Every day, Americans all over the nation see a yellow ribbon somewhere but do we listen to the

ribbon's words "Support Our Troops"? American soldiers not only need our support, but they also need our respect and our understanding.

The majority of American people support our troops because they know one or are one or even have lost one. Those who don't know a soldier must know they need our support! Veterans sign up to live or to die for America, and for that reason alone they deserve our support. Jonathan Spooner, a former US Marine, fought in Iraq for four years. Every time she had the chance to call or write to Jonathan, his wife Aimee would! Jonathan Spooner came home from his last deployment in Iraq in 2004. To this day he swears that there are two reasons why he made it back home alive, he says "God had my back, and I had Aimee waiting for me." My sister, Aimee, never gave up hope that he would return and she supported him in everything he did. It's for that simple reason Jonathan knew he could do anything he needed. Although support is extremely important, our soldiers also deserve our respect.

When a veteran comes home, he has paid a price. That price could be his life, his sanity, or even his ability to sleep at night. Staff Sergeant Jason C Ramseyer was the husband to a beautiful woman and two gorgeous daughters. On April 20, 2006 Jason and his troops were traveling when Jason suspected something unordinary. Jason hopped out of the Jeep and started walking. He told his men to stay back because something wasn't right. After walking not far at all, Jason was close enough to a landmine that enemy forces could have shot it and killed him. The enemy killed Jason on that day without sympathy. Jason C Ramseyer is now at Arlington Cemetery along with thousands of others who learned that freedom isn't free. Those men and women deserve our greatest respect! Even those who made it home deserve our respect, for they also have paid a price. As an American, I'm extremely grateful for all of the men and women in our armed forces! American veterans also deserve our understanding.

I can only imagine how hard it would be to see my best friend get shot, but soldiers do every day. It's hard to come back from such a rough time like that. When Americans see a soldier we smile and some thank them for their service but we don't have the slightest clue what the exact service was. Behind a soldier's eyes there's sights of inconceivable horrors. I may not understand what it was like to be a soldier, but I can understand how difficult it would be to try and live a normal life having seen those things. So, I thank every veteran I see because I understand that they have been through the unthinkable just so I can be free.

American soldiers give their all for the people of America. They deserve our support for fighting for freedom. Also, our veterans deserve our respect for paying the price of freedom. They also deserve our understanding for they have seen the unfathomable. Next

time I see the ribbon, I know that I support, respect, and understand our American soldiers!”

2014 2nd Place Winner, Kaitlin Sons

“Americans today can do with their lives whatever they please. They can take on occupations anywhere from being a doctor to a garbage man; this concept of indefinite possibilities is known as the “American dream”. The American dream fuels America every day, but does not come without a price. Each year, hundreds of thousand Americans sign a contract promising their services to our country so we can continue having a free homeland. These veterans receive little, or not any, support, respect, or understanding they should once returning home. The oppressing matter presently would be veterans not receiving support.

I was informed a couple of weeks ago by my great aunt that there were veterans of war not receiving the healthcare attention they should be. These veterans’ names were being written at the end of organ donation lists, which could accumulate a waiting time of one to three years. Our veterans, who have gone and fought for our freedom in multiple wars, are now fighting for their own lives because we are not giving them the medical attention needed. It is up to us, as Americans, to make sure our men of war are receiving support, not just from hospitals, but from everyone. Since we’re lacking support for our veterans, we are also lacking an essence of support – respect.

I was driving through my home town yesterday and happened to come upon a flag lying on the ground. The symbol of our freedom and unity was in a ditch on the side of the road. If we reminisce on the one time we have accounted soldiers folding a flag, we can see how we are suppose to treat a flag, with respect. We treat the flag with respect to show respect to the millions of lives lost protecting our symbol of freedom. Seeing the flag in the ditch is informative to me that we need more respect to veterans in everyday lives. This also shows our lacking of support.

Support is a seven-letter word that goes a long way. If anyone is deserving of support, it’s our troops. Through lines of fire they have walked, and for our freedom. Our veterans need our support. That means bumping them to the front of an organ donation list or showing our flag respect. We need to show our veterans that we’re grateful for their services, and the only way to do that is through support.

“America, land of the free, and home of the brave.” This popular quote holds a great deal of truth with its words. We are the “land of the free” because we are “home of the

brave”. Our brave fellow Americans are the reason we can become whatever we’d like in life. They give us freedom that other countries would kill for. Since they do that, veterans deserve our upmost support, respect, and understanding. So, let’s band together as a small town, state, and country to show our veterans we are grateful to be “home of the brave”.”

2014 3rd Place Winner, Shelby Comer

“Veterans are the men and women who have served our country. They have shown all of America how strong and brave they are. Veterans are incredible. Without them, we all would be living in a pure tragedy. I support and respect every single veteran there is one hundred percent. I think it is amazing that someone would risk their life for our country. They are very brave and have the biggest hearts. I would give each and every one of them a huge hug and a “thank-you” every chance I had. Veterans are brave because they leave behind their family while they go support and take care of everyone. They literally get face-to-face with the enemy.

It doesn’t matter if they got to see any action, or got to fight for our country, they are still a veteran. They gave up everything they had to give us everything they got. My grandpa, Samuel Comer, was a veteran. At his funeral, there were soldiers on each side of his casket while they placed an American Flag on top. Before they buried him, they shot off guns, and jets flew, which made me smile. I remember thanking him for everything he has done before they covered him up with dirt. If he was alive today, I would thank him every second I could. He is my hero and always will be. Without him and all the other veterans, we wouldn’t be who we are today. We are so very lucky to have people like them in this world. I think everyone should respect them, because they believe in us and they know we believe in them. So, have you thanked a Veteran today?”