

Nathan B. Henry Bridge dedication ceremony held to honor local hero

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It is seldom that our nation's war heroes are honored while they are still living. It is all too often that we hold memorials for those who dedicated their lives to defend our country. Macon County Board of Commissioners, joined by the Franklin Town Aldermen took it upon themselves to make sure that one of the community's heroes received the thanks he

deserved, while he was still able to enjoy it. Last Friday, government leaders, veterans and community members gathered at the Veterans Memorial Park to honor one of Macon County's heroes, Nathan B. Henry.

After returning home, Henry has continued to promote veterans and other humanitarian efforts.

NATHAN HENRY

Henry, who was the sole survivor from his platoon in a battle on July 12, 1967, was captured by the North Vietnamese Army. Henry was held captive for almost six years before being released and coming back to Macon County.

Henry has been recognized for his outstanding service and valor to the United States of America by being awarded two Silver Stars, two Bronze Stars, two Purple Hearts with Oak Leaf Clusters and numerous other medals.



He became an original member of the Burningtown Fire Department and helped secure land for the construction of the current department. He also served as a charter member of the Macon County Vietnam Veterans Chapter 994 and has served two terms as president and chairman

of the board of directors. Henry graduated from Haywood Community College with a degree in horticulture.

In honor of Henry's triumphant return home, his service to his country, and his continued efforts in the community and involvement in veterans affairs, the Macon

BYPASS BRIDGE NAMED IN HENRY'S HONOR



involvement in veterans affairs, the Macon County Board of Commissioners got approval from the state to name the bridge on the 441 by-pass in Henry's honor.

County Commissioner Chairman Kevin Corbin opened the ceremony. "Today we are not only proud to be Maconians, but we are proud to be Americans," said Corbin. "This recognition has been a long time coming and I am honored to be here with you today to be a part of it."



Franklin Mayor Joe Collins addressed the audience, which was comprised of Vietnam veterans, community members, and members of Rolling Thunder, a group which works to keep Prisoners of War and those Missing in Action at the forefront of public awareness in the country. Collins noted that when he was growing up in Franklin, he remembers the huge parade the town held in Henry's honor when he returned home in the 1970s.

Commissioner Ronnie Beale, who has worked tirelessly to get the bridge dedicated in Henry's honor, spoke about the history of the project. "The idea came about by me and a few people who are here today talking and deciding that we wanted to get it done," said Beale. "I called Nat, and if you haven't ever spoken on the phone with Nat, it can be real short sometimes."

Above, Georgia Congressman Heath Shuler congratulates Nathan Henry.

Former Vietnam Vets gather around Henry in support of his recognition



Beale explained that Henry did not want the bridge named in his honor, because he views his service and dedication as an honor and not something needing recognition. "So many times we wait too long and we end up doing in memory of," said Beale. "Well this is not a memorial, but this is to recognize a Maconian that we all deem as our hero in Macon County, who not only stands up here today as a Vietnam veteran, but as a symbol for the fight of all you Vietnam veterans who are out here today and that it took 40 long years to recognize."

NATHAN HENRY



In all of North Carolina, only two bridges are named for Medal of Honor recipients. The state has the Blue Star Highway, which is dedicated to all veterans.

“The state recognized Nat Henry as not only an American Hero, but

as a community servant,” said Beale.

According to Beale, Henry selected the speakers for the event, and decided on Congressman Health Shuler and former Senator John Snow. Henry wanted both men to speak because of their continued service and dedication to area veterans.

“The first time that I had the opportunity to speak to Nat Henry he told me that he wanted everyone to receive the same hero’s welcome that he did when he got home,” said Shuler. “He puts you first. He didn’t put himself first. He said it was about the other Vietnam veterans. It wasn’t about him. Whether it was creating the fire department in Burningtown or the work he does every single day for veterans, he puts you first. And I think that speaks more than any words that I could speak about an individual.” Shuler worked with Henry and Macon County Vietnam veteran Derrel Maxwell to establish a national Vietnam Veteran’s Day. The event, which is now celebrated around the country, all started with a conversation in Macon County.

Snow, who served in the Senate from 2005-2010, was selected to speak at the ceremony because Henry has worked closely with Snow on several matters pertaining to veterans affairs. “As I think of your service, I go

to scripture: John 15:13 Greater Love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends,” said Snow. “I was reluctant to use this scripture at first because it is generally used when there has been a death of a soldier. But as I thought of your selfless service, I realized that laying down one’s life for you was more than a once in a lifetime event. You did not die but you did lay down your life everyday of service and with special risk for the five years and eight months in captivity.

“You laid down your life for us, the American people, and your disability remains as a badge of courage for your service.”

President of Vietnam Veterans Chapter 994 Rick Norton spoke about the impact Henry has had on veterans in Macon County. “Nat still carries the scars today endured while a prisoner of war, but that doesn’t stop him from continuing to serve,” said Norton. “Nat is our comrade, our friend, and our brother. Nat is our hero. You don’t tell a hero by the name on the back of his jersey; you tell a hero by the ribbon on his chest.”

“It is hard to stand here today and put into words the love, and respect I have for Macon County,” said Henry. “When I came back to Western North Carolina I always said this is God’s country.”

Henry went on to thank the Vietnam Veterans Chapter 994 and members of Rolling Thunder who made the trip to honor Henry.

