

"Memorial Day 1967"

Carroll County Times Article for 1 June 1997

By Jay A. Graybeal

The 1967 Memorial Day observance marked the 100th anniversary of this community event. General Chairman F. Kale Mathias, Parade Marshall Atlee W. Wampler and Master of Ceremonies Commander Arthur Wilson, Carroll Post 31, American Legion, coordinated the event. Participants came from sixteen states and one newspaper estimated that the crowd numbered 15,000 people.

A somber portion of the event recognized the ultimate sacrifice of a recent Vietnam War casualty. Lt. Col. Charles G. Rose of the Military Science Department, Western Maryland College, presented the posthumous award of the Bronze Star Medal to the widow of Staff Sgt. James Norman Byers of Westminster. The citation read:

"For heroism in connection with military operations against a hostile force. Sgt. Byers distinguished himself while serving as a Squad Leader with Company B, 4th Battalion, 31st Infantry. On 20 January 1967, [his unit was on a search and] destroy operation in Tay Ninh Province, Republic of Vietnam, when it encountered intense enemy small arms fire, temporarily halting its advance. He realized that to be effective against the enemy, his squad must move immediately to gain fire superiority. Disregarding his own personal safety, Sergeant Byers exposed himself to enemy fire to rally his squad and coordinate their fires, forcing the enemy to withdraw.

On the same day, the platoon was attacked while setting up a base camp. Sergeant Byers again exposed himself to intensive enemy fire to maneuver his men to neutralize the enemy. While so exposed, Sergeant Byers was mortally wounded.

Inspired by his actions, his squad forced the enemy withdraw. Sergeant Byers' actions reflect outstanding professionalism and devotion to duty and bring great credit upon himself, his unit, the 196th Light Infantry Brigade, and the United States Army."

A reporter from Democratic Advocate noted that the awarding of the posthumous medal "add[ed] reality to the Vietnam situation". Tragically, Sgt. Byers would not be the last Carroll Countian to die in the conflict. The conflict would claim additional lives including Air Force Lt. Col. Sherman E. Flanagan, Jr., a member of the 100th Anniversary Committee. Lt. Col. Flanagan was shot down and killed flying a mission over the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) on July 21, 1968.

The Democratic Advocate ran a lengthy article which described the remainder of the event, in part:

"Lt. General Milton A. Reckord, a famed war hero who holds many honors, one of which is Doctor of Military Science from Western Maryland College, was the guest speaker.

He paid tribute to a Carroll County woman, Miss Mary Bostwick Shellman, who started the Memorial Day observance 100 years ago [and] in 1882 to change it from Decoration Day to Memorial Day.

He recalled as late as 1927 Miss Shellman, with the Mayor, the late George Matthews, led a parade and spoke at the same place. She read a poem which honored the men of the North and South of World War I.

The Decoration Day poem, written by Harry J. Shellman in 1873 was read by Mrs. Marie S. Beggs, Westminster, who portrayed Miss Mary Bostwick Shellman, founder of Memorial Day in Carroll County.

The Rev. John P. Buchheister, pastor of the Westminster Methodist Church, pronounced the benediction.

The National Anthem was sung by Florence Kirk Keppel, music instructor at the Sykesville High School and formerly with the Metropolitan Opera Association. She was accompanied by a choral group from Sykesville High School and the Westminster Municipal Band, under the direction of Robert K. Mathias.

Molleville Farm Post 467, VFW, furnished the firing squad while taps and the echo was in charge of William F. Myers Sons Band.

Following the ceremonies, the children placed flowers on the flag marked graves of veterans."

The event closed with a sham Civil War battle at the newly opened Carroll County Farm Museum. Fourteen visiting reenactment groups from Florida, Alabama, Michigan, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Delaware, Virginia, West Virginia, North Carolina, Ohio, Tennessee and Rhode Island had bivouacked on the site prior to the event. An trophy award program for the reenactors brought a close to the public observances of the 100th Anniversary observances.

Photo caption: The 100th Memorial Day observances in Westminster included the presentation of a posthumous Bronze Star Medal to Staff Sgt. James Norman Byers who had been killed in action in Vietnam on January 20, 1967. Historical Society of Carroll County Copy Photograph Collection.