

Local residents, family members pay tribute to a hero during Springfield Memorial Day festivities

by Rose Quinn May 31, 2016



SPRINGFIELD>> Marine Pfc. Frank O. Holloway never met his only son and namesake.

By the time Frank O. Holloway II was born on June 27, 1953, the 21-year-old former Springfield father was already listed as MIA in Korea for six months – a fate befallen him after he'd gone to relieve a gunnery crew and provide assistance to the wounded.

“Deeply regret to inform you that your husband Private Frank Orville Holloway is missing since 1 January 1953 in Korea in the performance of his duty and service of his country. I realize your great anxiety but details not available and delay in receipt thereof is to be expected,” reads the Western Union telegram from then-Marine Corps Commandant Lemuel C. Shepherd Jr. to Holloway’s devoted war bride just days after the bloody battle.

It's one of two telegrams that family members have kept over the years, along with photographs and some letters.

According to Holloway II, now 62, it was when the Marines sent his father to the West Coast that he met and fell in love with Phyllis Joan "Jo" Scott of Anaheim, Calif. His parents married in Las Vegas, Nev., in September of 1952, only to part a few weeks later when Holloway was shipped out to the Korean peninsula.

The elder Holloway, who was with Company B, 1st Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment, 1st Marine Division, was ultimately declared killed in action and "presumed dead" by the U.S. Marine Corps on Jan. 7, 1954. While his body has not been recovered, his son and other members of the Gold Star family including brother, 87-year-old Kenneth Holloway of Newlin Township in Chester County and formerly of Concord; and sister, 83-year-old Shirley Miller of the Secane section of Ridley Township, will never give up hope.

"It's always been a mystery. Is my father alive? Is he in a prison camp?" the son said. "We all know the political situation. But I don't know that a part of me doesn't still think, or hope, that he could somehow still be there."

A hero's welcome in Springfield

On Monday, it was hero's welcome for at least 20 members of the Holloway family as the Springfield American Legion Post 227 honored their fallen family member during Memorial Day festivities. Holloway is Springfield's only casualty from the Korean War.

Holloway II and his wife, Patty, traveled from their home in Laguna Niguel, Calif., for the proud occasion. They participated in a short parade, which was led by a Legion color guard and featured the Springfield High School Marching Band and several pieces of township fire apparatus.

As the couple was chauffeured in a red truck with markings identifying Holloway as a Springfield High School student killed in Korea, Frank and Patty waved out the windows to supporters young and old who were standing along the parade route.

The parade ended at the township building on Powell Road. There, a solemn crowd gathered as the American flag was raised high to the pole top as the band played the Star Spangled Banner, and then lowered to half-staff to the sound of Taps played by a high school bugler. There was also a rifle salute.

As guest speaker, Army Col. Richard Debany, a Springfield resident, recognized the Gold Star families in the audience, as well as others throughout the community.

"We're humbled by your sacrifices and inspired by your resilience," he said.

Since last year, 30 names have been added to the list of more than 1.1 million servicemen and women from across the country who made the ultimate sacrifice.

"From our first nine countrymen who perished shortly after dawn on Wednesday, April 19, 1775 bravely facing British muskets and bayonets on Lexington's village common ... to 25-year-old Washington National Guardsman, 1st Lieut. David Bauders, from Seattle, Washington, who died Friday, May 6, at Al Asad Air Base, Iraq, we must remember," Debany said. "Let us not forget, too, that we assemble today as a nation still at war."

Debany paid homage to 39 of 40 residents from Springfield who gave their lives to defend our nation and our allies – 30 in World War II, one in Korea and eight in Vietnam – and whose names are listed on a plaque outside the township building. The name of another township son, Army Pfc. Michael Smith who died in Iraq in 2015, will be added to the memorial next year, according to a legion member.

"The names are cast in bronze so that we never forget – even after time slowly fades our personal memories," Debany said.

"However, there is one name in particular to which we pay special tribute today – Pvt. Frank Orville Holloway."

Siblings' memories

Holloway was the fourth of five children born to Harry Nelson Holloway 3rd of Chester, and Anna Bella Jones Holloway of Media. The family, which included brothers, Nelson and Kenneth, and sisters, Shirley and Regina, lived on Lindsey Street in Chester before moving to Dearborn, Mich.

Kenneth Holloway recalled being in the second grade when they made the move.

With only 26 months between them in age, Ken and Frank were very close growing up, as well as competitive.

"Frank was a good kid," his brother said in a telephone interview last week.

When their father died, Frank was about 16. His mother packed up and returned with the children to Delaware County in 1949 to be close to her family, moving into a house on Woodland Avenue in Springfield.

"I came to Springfield in 10th grade. Frank would have been in the 11th," said Shirley, recalling her brother during an advance interview as happy-go-lucky, popular and off-the-chart handsome.

"I had more girlfriends than I could handle because they figured if they got invited to my house, they would see Frank," she said. Even today, the thought made her chuckle.

But school wasn't Frank Holloway's passion, she said. He left and went to work as a laborer. Before long, he was a Marine.

According to Ken, his brother enlisted in the Marines in the spring of 1951. The day Frank left for the service, Ken and Nelson, now deceased, went with Frank into the Philadelphia. While Nelson drove off to work, Ken and Frank stopped at a shop at 22nd and Chestnut streets.

"Frank and I had coffee together," recalled Ken. "I had my reservations and I wanted to make sure he had given consideration to what he was doing."

Some family members suspected that Frank was following in the footsteps of Nelson who, in Ken's words, "served with great distinction in World War II" in the Marines, earning a Purple Heart.

All these years later, Ken said, "I just have a profound feeling for the wonderful person Frank was."

'Horrible, beyond measure'

By the time Holloway arrived in Korea, Debany told Monday's crowd, "The war had become something of a stalemate, with each side aggressively vying for more territory to gain an advantage in the truce talks in nearby Panmunjom. From outposts, United Nations and Communist forces fought doggedly hill to hill, both defending gained ground and launching localized offensive operations to increase territory."

It was on the evening of Jan. 1, 1953, while in defensive positions just east of Panmunjom, that Capt. H.F. Painter, commander of Baker Company, dispatched a platoon-size force to assault entrenched Communist Chinese – a raid in which Holloway Sr. was included, Debany said.

Describing the terrain as rugged, hilly and with all vegetation destroyed, Debany asked the rapt audience to try and visualize the environment that night:

“Although the moon was nearly full, it was still low on the eastern horizon when the raid launched at about 10:30 p.m. It was cold, bitterly cold. In those freezing temperatures, the raiding party with Pvt. Holloway advanced on the enemy’s position. A heavy small-arms and automatic weapons fight erupted as they reached their adversary’s trench line; close combat ensued.”

Debany noted the Marines lacked night vision capability, as well as aerial systems feeding live intelligence into their ears and close air support.

“Overall, they didn’t have any sort of overmatch advantage; in fact, there was relative tactical parity with the Chinese that fateful night,” according to Debany. “The fight was intense and bloody and the platoon experienced, as Capt. Painter later wrote to Frank’s family, ‘terrific enemy mortar fire.’”

Debany continued with the details of that night.

“The mortar fire concentrated on the assaulting force and made several direct hits on the automatic weapons squad that was laying down essential protective fire for the assaulting men. The Chinese defense ultimately proved too strong, and, about 90 minutes after it began, the patrol was forced to break contact and withdraw back to its defense positions.”

Holloway – son, brother, husband, soon-to-be father – was last seen “in the midst of the ferocious fight, helping with the evacuation of wounded,” Debany said. “In the Army, we make a solemn vow to never leave a fallen comrade behind. The Marines of Baker Company indeed felt the same. Before the dawn, to their great personal jeopardy, they retraced their steps nearly back to the enemy trenches to find their missing; unfortunately, they found no sign of Pvt. Holloway.”

Said Debany: “Sixty-three years later on this peaceful day here in Springfield, it’s impossible to appreciate the darkness, noise and confusion of that night, but we can be assured that it was horrible beyond measure.”

Months wore on and loved ones on both coasts waited for news, hoping that Frank had survived and was taken prisoner by the Chinese.

In late summer, loved ones awaited the release of American POWs.

Holloway’s wife learned her husband “was not among the prisoners released by the communists.” The Western Union telegram, dated the morning of Sept. 12, 1953, assured every effort was being made to “ascertain the fate of our missing Marines.”

His father’s image

Three years after Holloway was presumed dead, his widow remained in California and married William Findley, also a Marine. Together, they raised Frank II, as well as their daughter, 59-year-old Barbara Truchio.

“I believe he and my mom decided not to adopt me out of respect for my father,” Holloway II said.

Holloway II said his mother never spoke much about his father.

“I can’t imagine how it must have been for her,” said the self-employed father of three daughters and grandfather of one. “I know she loved him very much.” Jo Findley died of cancer in 1984.

Holloway II was merely “a babe in arms” when he first met his uncle Ken, but their visits were few during the nephew’s formative years. Holloway II was probably in his early 30s when he reconnected with relatives on the East Coast.

“The first time I laid eyes on him as an adult, he looked like my brother,” Ken said.

While the only parents he knew provided him a good, normal life, Holloway II said he just wanted to know about his father.

"He didn't have a very long life," Holloway II said. "I always wondered what he was like."

Holloway II was overcome by emotion several times throughout Monday's ceremony, especially during Taps.

"I lost it ... not only for my father, but for all the other heroes who lost their lives," he said.

Holloway II knew his father's name was etched on the Springfield veterans' plaque and on the walls at The National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific in Hawaii, informally known as Punchbowl Cemetery. But as far as he knew, the ceremony marked the first time his father's story was publicly shared.

"It was such an honor," said Holloway II, expressing thanks on behalf of his entire family to all those who organized the tribute.

Later Monday, during a visit to the Delaware County Veterans Memorial in Newtown Square, Holloway II was touched again when he saw his father was included among the honored names.
