

VFW Honors Nation's Last Surviving WW I Veteran: Frank W. Buckles Awarded Gold Medal of Merit

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KANSAS CITY, Mo. — The last known surviving veteran of World War I was recently recognized by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States. Frank W. Buckles, 107, was awarded the VFW Commander-in-Chief Gold Medal for his “extraordinary achievements and as a cherished representative of all World War I veterans.”

“Frank Buckles has embodied all that is symbolic of the American spirit, admirably serving his nation during times of war and peace with utmost integrity and distinguished honor, while always upholding the venerated core values of the United States of America,” said VFW Junior Vice Commander Tommy Tradewell, who presented the distinguished award during ceremonies held Memorial Day weekend at the Liberty Memorial, the nation’s only memorial honoring World War I veterans.

Impeccably dressed, spry and smiling, Buckles, who is two years younger than the VFW, graciously accepted the award, remarking softly that he was impressed with the reception he has received as a representative of World War I.

“I always knew I had a feeling of longevity, but I didn’t know I would be the number one,” he said.

Buckles is a Life Member of VFW Post 896 in Chesterfield, West Virginia, and enlisted in the Army in 1917 at the age of 16. Although initially rejected by the Army for being underage, a determined Buckles came back a few weeks later, and, greeted by the same sergeant who weeks earlier had rejected the enthusiastic Buckles, asked the young Missourian once again how old he was. Buckles replied “21.” No further questions were asked, and Buckles was shipped to Fort Riley, Kansas, for training.

“That longevity,” said Tradewell, who spent Saturday evening with Buckles at a special VFW-hosted dinner, “could be attributed to the fact that Mr. Buckles entire career was spent as an ‘underage soldier.’”

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A Missouri native from Harrison County, Buckles drove motorcycles and ambulances in England and France. During the Occupation, he guarded German prisoners of war. A civilian during World War II, he worked for the White Star steamship line and was in Manila on a business trip when he was captured by the Japanese December 1941. He then spent three years as a civilian POW in a Japanese Interment Camp before being rescued.

“It has been a privilege to have an opportunity to honor Mr. Buckles and spend time with him,” said Tradwell, a Vietnam veteran from Sussex, Wis. “He is truly a great American, admirably serving his nation during times of war and peace with utmost integrity and distinguished honor. I am fortunate to represent the 1.7 million members of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States in honoring him and the memory of all those who served and died during World War I.”