

Post in Tennessee Inspires Youth

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VFW Post 10904 in Manchester, Tennessee, hosted its first-ever Young American Awards during Manchester's 57th annual "Old Timer's Day" in October.

More than 70 children and their parents stopped by the VFW booth in Town Square to compete for one of the 50 awards issued to those who could properly recite the Pledge of Allegiance.

"You never know how you will influence a child or what they may take from something as simple as reciting the Pledge correctly," said Post Commander Kimberly King. "This also gave us an opportunity to interact with parents. I was able to answer questions from civilians as well as sign up two new members."

Each child who recited the Pledge of Allegiance properly, with their hand over their heart, received a certificate signed by King, Virginia Hooker of the VFW Auxiliary and Ed Reader Sr., the Post's only World War II veteran.

"Being the first time ever that we presented these awards, it allowed us to see how delighted the children and their parents were," King added. "It's worked so well that we will look to do it more often at our events."

The following weekend, members of Post 10904 also hosted a surprise birthday party for Reader, who turned 97 years old on Oct. 18.

The celebration brought together more than 45 people, which included family, friends, VFW members and Coffee County Mayor Gary Cordell, who personally thanked Reader for his service in WWII as well as his current involvement with the Post and local community.

"Ed was all smiles and even told me he thought he had missed a meeting when he saw all the

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cars outside,” King said. “We are all humbled by Ed. He has not let his age slow him down or interfere with his duties. We all admire him, and he is hands down our most cherished member.”

Reader, a Rome, New York, native, joined the Army Air Corps in June 1942, deploying during WWII with the 15th Air Force, 463rd Bomb Group, 774th Bomb Squadron, where he served as a waist gunner aboard a B-12.

According to Reader, he was shot in the arm by a German Luftwaffe’s 22mm bullet during an air raid on May 18, 1944. Upon ejecting from his burning plane, Reader was captured by the Germans, who operated on his arm without anesthesia and kept him as a prisoner of war until his release on Oct. 23, 1944.

After his recovery in Europe, Staff Sgt. Reader was then sent to the Pacific Theater, where he flew as a Crew Chief on C-47's until the end of the war.

Reader relocated to Manchester after the war, where he worked at a local bank for decades. He joined the VFW shortly after 1945 and has been both a Post commander and current trustee.

“Ed is amazing as he continues to contribute to our Post in everything we do,” King said. “He has never missed a meeting, and he attends all District meetings. He is always there for our VFW monthly breakfasts, and he registers all members and visitors at our meetings.”

Reader also has participated in history projects held by local schools, national contests in which Post 10904 has participated and often leads the charge at Post parades during Veterans Day and Memorial Day.

“He has been the grand marshal in several parades, attended or participated in nearly every event we have either put on or attended,” King added. “He is one of the direct reasons we won the VFW National All American Post and All State Awards for two years in a row. I could not be more honored, as a commander and veteran, in having such a wonderful man in our Post.”