

History museum honors anniversary of Scouting

By Elaina O'Neal

Morgan County History Center and Museum

MORGAN COUNTY — The Morgan County History Center and Museum in Martinsville has recently added several new exhibits, including one honoring the Boy Scouts of Morgan County.

Local Troop 219 will be celebrating its 50th anniversary on Sept. 7 from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the Morgan County Fairgrounds.

In lieu of this historic date, the museum's display features artifacts from people who have been influential in Morgan County's scouting community.

The primary contributors to this display case were Steven Lamar, who is currently both the Advancement Chair and the Assistant Scoutmaster of Troop 219 for many years, as well as a former Boy Scout in the troop, and Judy DeBaets.

Raymond Debaets, Judy's late husband, was the man who started Troop 219, but it was Judy's signature on the paperwork that officially established the organization. Judy also possessed much of Emerson Laughner's scouting memorabilia and donated it to the museum.

Laughner was an integral figure in the history of Martinsville. He founded the Martinsville Chamber of Commerce in 1940 and was the secretary for 22 years. His business ventures included owning Emerson's Grocery, Indiana Hickory Furniture Co., Laughner's Tax Service, Morgan County Credit Bureau, and Laughner's Wearly Monuments, but his longest commitment was his involvement in Boy Scouts of America for 68 years.

The Debaets and Laughner collection is quite impressive as it includes the original Troop 21 Charter, a letter of congratulations from President Ronald Reagan, many awards and patches, a National Jamboree Journal and Certificate of Attendance from 1937, Court of Honor records from the 1930s, and some newspaper clippings of past community involvement.

The Lamar collection has more traditional mementos such as official BSA clothing from the



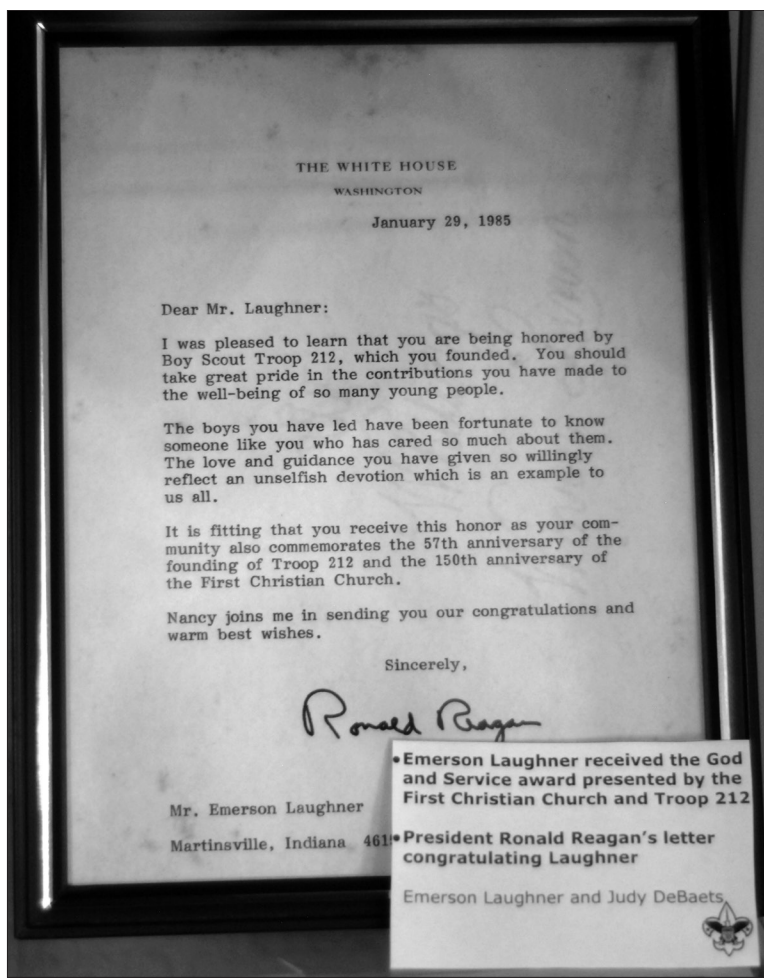
ABOVE: Steven Lamar's contribution to the Boy Scout display at the history museum includes an array of old photos of Morgan County Scouts from over the years. (Stephen Crane photo / MCC)



LEFT: A patchwork of badges are on display as part of the Emerson Laughner and Judy DeBaets collection. (Stephen Crane photo / MCC)

BELOW: Emerson Laughner received this personal letter from President Ronald Reagan in January 1985, congratulating him on the honors he received from Boy Scout Troop 212, which Laughner founded. (Stephen Crane photo / MCC)

LEFT: This Boy Scout Fire Starting Kit from the 1930s was donated by Harold Parker of Morgantown and is a part of the Boy Scout display at the history museum. (Stephen Crane photo / MCC)



'70s and '80s, pictures of Scouts through the years, and camp supplies. The display has little bits of many troops that have impacted the youth of Morgan County.

With the Scout's previous actions in teaching leadership, engaging in community service, and cultivating a positive extracurricular for kids to engage in, the museum is not only honoring the past achievements of the troops but also looking forward to their future impact on the community.

To learn more about the 50th anniversary, contact Steven Lamar at 4asrslamar@sbcglobal.net.

The Morgan County History Center and Museum, located at 127 S. Main St. in Martinsville, is open Mondays from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., Thursdays from 4 to 7 p.m., and Saturdays from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Elaina "Lainey" O'Neal served as a summer intern for the Morgan County History Center and Museum, as well as assisting with The Wall That Heals. She is from Eminence.



The invasion force from Operation Dragoon takes over the shoreline at Provence, France, where 151,000 American and French soldiers were deployed for a push toward German lines. (Public domain photo)

World War II at 80: August 1944

New landing, more progress

By Ronald P. May
MCC Contributor

August brought good news of a new amphibious landing in France and military progress in both the European and Pacific theaters of the war.

On Aug. 10, the island of Guam was liberated by U.S. Army and Marine Corps troops after landing there on July 21.

The island, one of five American jurisdictions in the Pacific and the southernmost of the long Mariana Islands chain, was captured by Japanese forces on Dec. 8, 1941, and occupied by them for two and a half years.

With the securing of Guam, all the Mariana Islands came under American control. Several of the islands were soon to be used as air bases for U.S. bombers to begin their bombing campaign on mainland Japan.

Progress came in the European theater as well with advancement in Italy and a new amphibious landing in southern France.

Throughout the month of August, the U.S. Army advanced north up the western part of the Italian peninsula. By the summer of 1944, the Army added four more divisions to the 5th Army, and by August, they had reached the Gothic line of German defenses north of the cities of Pisa and Florence.

Allied advancement in France also saw progress

in August.

On Aug. 15, the Allied forces made a second amphibious invasion of France, this time on the southern coast.

Codenamed Operation Dragoon, an initial force of 151,000 American and French soldiers landed along the beachhead at Provence, France, and began their push northward into German lines. In the days ahead, the number of landing forces reached 577,000.

The operation successfully secured French ports along the Mediterranean coast and forced a second front in the war against Germany.

In northern France, a much-celebrated liberation took place on Aug. 25 as the city of Paris was liberated after four years of occupation by the German military.

French and American forces took a triumphant march down the historic Champs Elysees through thousands of Parisians who gathered to welcome their heroes.

The liberation came after eight weeks of combat in Normandy, following the D-Day landings on June 6 in which 29,000 Americans were killed and 106,000 wounded.

Two men from Morgan County were counted among the casualties in the effort to liberate France.

SSgt. Cecil Eugene Lauderman was wounded in Southern France on Aug. 1, 1944.

Lauderman joined the



American troops from the 28th Infantry Division march down the Champs Elysees in Paris during the Victory Parade on Aug. 25, 1944. (Public domain photo)



As part of Operation Dragoon, U.S. Army soldiers push inland from the coast of Southern France as they work their way toward German lines. All told, 577,000 troops were involved in the operation. (Public domain photo)

Army on Sept. 14, 1942, and served with L Company of the 83rd Infantry Division.

He survived his wound in Southern France and participated in combat operations in Northern France and the Ardennes.

After returning home, he was discharged from the Army on Aug. 28, 1945.

Tragically, he died that same year, on Nov. 23, in an accident.

It wasn't the first tragedy endured by the Lauderman family.

Months earlier, on the other side of the world, Lauderman's brother, Marine Pfc.

Robert G. Lauderman of Morgan County, was killed on the island of Saipan. He received a Silver Star posthumously.

Private Robert (Bobby) Kidwell of Banta became another casualty in the fighting to secure Southern France. He died on Aug. 28, five days before his 20th birthday.

He was born in 1924 and graduated from Center Grove High School in 1943.

After a brief time in North Africa, Kidwell landed with Army forces in Anzio, Italy, and participated in the Italian campaign. He made it to Rome before being trans-

ferred to the 7th Army in Southern France where he lost his life as his unit moved up the Riviera and fought the Germans.

Kidwell's body was temporarily interred in Southern France before getting shipped to the U.S. for burial in Indiana in May 1948.

In a June 5, 1948, tribute article in the Daily Reporter, Kidwell was described as having a "cheerful and kind disposition, and always greeting everyone with a smile. He was especially courteous to old people and to the afflicted. When home on a short furlough, those

were among the ones he visited."

A moving tribute to Kidwell and other American war dead appeared at the end of the article in a poem written by Ione Duke, a neighbor of the Kidwells.

*Throughout the broad expanse of this fair land
The hero dead are coming home to rest —
Home at last from some far distant strand
Whereupon they found and died.
Yes, today Bobby is back home.
Tonight, the American Stars will
Shine gently upon his grave
Nor shall your glory be forgotten
While time this record keeps
Or honor points the hallowed spot,
Where valor proudly sleeps.*

During the month of August, progress was secured and celebrated, but at the cost of heroic sacrifice.

Next time: September 1944

Learn more about Ronald P. May and his books at https://ronaldpamay.com or contact him by email at ron@ronaldpamay.com. Check out his videos on YouTube at: World War II History & Stories with Ron May.