

2023 Kennett Memorial Day Parade

## Grand marshals share their stories of service to country

Three local veterans will lead the patriotic procession through Kennett Square on Memorial Day, Monday, May 29. It's possible, in the midst of all the buzz and excitement, to miss the significance of what these men represent—to the community and the country.

The 2023 Kennett Square Memorial Day Parade's grand marshals—Bill Taylor, Hugh Hagerty, and Phil Donohoe—have all led lives of faithful service. While their stories are very different, they're united in urging Americans of every generation to show respect and gratitude for all who

have served, and are serving, in the U.S. Armed Forces. Here are their stories.

### Former Parade Chairman honored for laying a strong foundation

Former Memorial Day Parade Chairman Bill Taylor, who organized and ran the parade until 2019, is being honored as a grand marshal this year.

"We owe Bill a debt of gratitude for all that he did for 16 years," said current parade Chairman Dave Haradon. "The new committee is moving forward



Phil Donohoe

Bill Taylor

Hugh Hagerty

with the event, building on the strong foundation that Bill, along with his family

and his company, Taylor Oil & Propane, laid for us." Taylor grew up in Kennett

Square with a deep appreciation for the sacrifices

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made by those serving in World War II. As a child he collected newspapers and scrap iron for the war effort and gathered cattails to make parachutes with his father. He remembers black-outs in town during air raids and his mother using ration coupons. He also vividly recalls how "the town went crazy" the day the war was over.

This sense of respect for duty and sacrifice led Taylor to enlist. After basic training at Fort Knox, he served in the U.S. Army from 1956 to 1964 under the Army Active Reserve Program. He was sent to Fort Lee in Virginia for supply school training and then was assigned to the Army Training Center in Delaware for one night a week of training and two weeks of training every summer at various Army bases. Taylor is a lifetime member and vice commander of the Kennett American Legion Post #491.

The Kennett Square Memorial Day Parade grew and flourished under his leadership to include a vast and diverse array of floats and performers from across the community and around the region. However, honoring the veterans who have served as grand marshals over the years was always at the heart of Taylor's vision for the Memorial Day Parade. Taylor knows how important it is for them to share their stories—and for those stories to be heard by younger generations. It's a fitting tribute, Haradon said, to honor Taylor as a grand marshal this year as he passes the baton of the

parade's leadership to a new generation of community leaders.

### A '19-year-old' Korean War veteran

Hugh Hagerty emanates gratitude—for his life and for his experiences serving in the U.S. Army Signal Corps during the Korean War. Fresh out of high school in 1953, the Delaware County native decided to volunteer for the draft service along with four friends from his neighborhood. At the time, the question for all young men was when, not if, they would serve.

"Every able-bodied young guy knew he had a military obligation," Hagerty explained. "We decided we'd get our military service in so we could get on with our lives."

At the time, the Korean War was at a standstill.

After basic training in Georgia, the 19-year-old Hagerty, who was the eldest of his friends by six days, was immediately shipped out to Korea while the rest of his friends ended up serving stateside. He wouldn't return home for 16 months.

"I was a kid when I left," he said, and he's grateful for the many different people he met who helped him grow up during his time in Korea. Hagerty's unit was responsible for maintaining communications for the entire South Korean peninsula, on four mountainous sites from the southern end all the way to the DMZ.

"I never felt bad about having to go into the service," he said. "I learned so much that's not in books." He's also grateful that he didn't experience the kind

of sustained combat that others did.

A sense of humor and a natural propensity to look on the bright side aren't the only qualities that have kept Hagerty young at heart. On his way to Korea in 1953, the ship passed the international date line on his twentieth birthday.

"I never had a twentieth birthday," he said. "I'm forever a teenager!"

By the time Hagerty left Korea, he was promoted to company clerk. He laughed as he described how he could only type with one finger on each hand.

"But I was a good speller, so I got the job. I was Radar O'Reilly!" he said. In fact, Hagerty recommends the television show *M\*A\*S\*H* for anyone wishing to get a true depiction of the Korean War, and attests to the accuracy of the popular series.

"The show's creators must have been there. I swear some of those stories came from my unit," he said.

Hagerty's homecoming is another one of his favorite stories.

"When we left the dock on our way to Korea, they were serving coffee and donuts and the band was playing," he said. But they arrived back at an (almost) empty dock.

"Two of my friends happened to be stationed there at Fort Lewis in Seattle at the time," Hagerty recalled. "So, I said to a soldier, a fellow I hadn't met who was docking with me, 'Do you see those two fellows down on the dock? They're here to see me!' He didn't believe me, but I told him to stick with me and I'd prove it." He did prove it, and Hagerty was able to spend about an hour catching up with his friends before

being shipped to Chicago. A month later, he said, they were all back together in the neighborhood, 21 years old and ready to move forward with their lives.

Hagerty was discharged from active service on Feb. 29, 1956.

"I celebrate my discharge every four years," he said with a laugh. "I've been out of the service for 15 years now!"

His experience in the Signal Corps and his veteran status gave him a leg up when applying for a job at the telephone company, what was then Pennsylvania Bell, where he worked for 37 years until his retirement. He met his wife that summer of 1956, they were married in October, and three years later they had three young children.

"That was a lot more responsibility than serving in Korea," he said. Nine years later, they had their fourth child. "Some fellows weren't drafted until they were 25 or 26," he said, and he's glad he signed on when he did so he could be there to help raise his family.

Hagerty has lived in Lincoln University with his youngest daughter and her family for the past 20 years. He loves being part of the lives of his 11 grandchildren and 13 great-grandchildren and also enjoys spending time at the VFW Post 5467 in Kennett Square.

"It's one of my hang outs," he said. "There are always people there." He noted that there aren't many new veterans any more. "Not much military time is being served. Fortunately, it's changed a lot." But it's hard, he said, for young people who make the choice to serve. Thanks to

them, young people today aren't required to sign up for the draft.

"I wish young kids today respected their peers who volunteer to serve in the military to a greater extent than they do," he said. "They keep the wolf away from the door for everyone."

### A nonagenarian who continues in active service

While Hagerty's six days of seniority resulted in his being the only one of his friends to serve in Korea, fellow grand marshal Paul Donohoe missed being shipped to Korea by just as narrow a margin.

Donohoe graduated from Kennett High School in 1949 and was drafted into the Army on May 6, 1953. "I reported to Coatesville and boarded a train for Philadelphia and from there to Camp Atterbury, Indiana for basic training," he explained.

After graduating as a combat infantryman, he received orders to ship to Korea. But in the meantime, the conflict there had ended, so Donohoe was sent to Fort Leonard Wood in Missouri to work in the stockade with the 208th Military Police Company. From there he transferred to the Disciplinary Barracks at Fort Leavenworth in Kansas where he worked as a guard.

"This was a prison for Army and Air Force detainees held for every infraction from being AWOL to murder," he said. "I served the rest of my time in this post, first as an aide to the 1st Sergeant and later as an aide to the Colonel."

After his honorable discharge from active duty on May 5, 1955, Donohoe returned home to take a

position as a partner in a local mushroom farm with his father-in-law, Wade Wilson. Two years later, he started his own mushroom-growing business in Avondale.

Donohoe's life of active service and leadership, however, had only just begun. He was a volunteer firefighter for the Avondale Fire Company for over 20 years and served with the Avondale Fire Police, including three years as president. He was also Code Enforcement Officer in New Garden Township and is a longtime member of the Kennett American Legion Post #491 and Sage's Senior Group and Grand Knight of the Knights of Columbus Council.

Even now, in his 90s, Donohoe continues to serve his community. He is president of the Residents' Council of Jenner's Pond, where he currently serves on the Landscaping Committee and is chairman of the Safety Council. He is also vice president of the Kennett Alumni Association.

"I would like to remind all members of the community the importance of continuing to support those who serve and have served in the United States Armed Forces with gratitude, dignity and respect," he said.

The Memorial Day Parade Committee encourages the community to come out to honor Taylor, Hagerty, and Donohoe, and all past and present service men and women, at the Kennett Square Memorial Day Parade on May 29 at 10 a.m. Find more details about the parade, the route, and parking information, at kennettmemorialdayparade.com.