

New Star to be Added to American Legion Centennial Memorial on November 11

By Elissa Petruzzi

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Earl L. Smith Jr. was a drummer in the U.S. Navy band during World War II and the Korean War, before returning home to West Windsor to live a long and service-filled life. His star is about 13 inches up and six to the left of Raymond Edward Stone Jr.'s, a Princeton High class of 1965 graduate. He was killed in action during the Viet Nam war after saving the lives of many soldiers. James D. Priestap's star is three inches up from Stone's, about seven inches over. He was killed in Baghdad on Thanksgiving Day, minutes after giving candy to children nearby.

These centograph stars and more than 40 others commemorate veterans, their lives and service, at the American Legion Centennial Memorial in West Windsor. And on Veteran's Day, Saturday, November 11, another star will be added, to honor longtime Princeton resident and World War II veteran Henry J. Frank, who died last November.

"He was part of the D-Day invasion," his daughter Carolyn Frank remembered. "He was on a ship that had a batch of trucks and half-trucks, and they were supposed to land on Normandy Beach. But the captain of the ship didn't want to get close enough, so they watched the invasion," from the deck, she said.

After eventually landing on French shores, Frank, who was fluent in both French and German, helped to resettle local towns. Once the war in Europe ended, Frank was sent to run a U.S. Army officer's club in Grenoble, France. "My mother appreciated it, because he learned how to dance," his daughter said.

It's stories like these that sculptor Pietro Del Fabro hoped would come to life when he created the memorial. "I wanted people to take ownership," Del Fabro said. "Often relatives and friends do not know the service details of a veteran's life. When they come to put a star on the cenotaph, I ask them to say a few words. It's always a poignant moment." Del Fabro has found that, "the relatives and friends usually have learned many new things in the process of writing a short bio about their veteran, after talking to other relatives, or even searching the national archives." The stories of the veterans memorialized by the stars in the Danby white marble are available on the West Windsor township website for all to read.

The living memorial was created in part, thanks to West Windsor Mayor Shing-Fu Hsueh. "I said, 'Let's build a memorial,' and I went to see the mayor," Cox recalled. About a week later they were walking the grounds at the municipal center, searching for the perfect spot. "I thought it would take a year," to get the necessary approvals, Cox said, but Hsueh told Cox, "It's done."

Since the memorial's dedication last year, Del Fabro has added stars for veterans of World War I, II — and even the Civil War. Fathers, uncles, and friends have been commemorated. A veteran himself, Del Fabro said, "It's been a powerful experience to watch as they use a chisel to make a star before laying in the gold leaf."

“We have room to on that monument to put 2000 stars,” Cox said. “It’s beautiful when the sunlight hits it in the afternoon.”

And on Saturday, November 11, Henry Frank’s daughters Ellyn McMullin and Carolyn will be there, to dedicate a star to their father. Frank’s star is being added on Veteran’s Day thanks to his many years of service to the American Legion, both as Post Commander and Adjutant. “He never missed going to a meeting or doing the right thing,” Cox said. “Henry knew the procedure without looking in the book.”

“He was quite a guy,” Cox added. “We miss him.”

EVENT DETAILS: The ceremony starts at 11 am on Veterans Day, Saturday, November 11, 2017. Sponsored by American Legion Post 76 and the West Windsor Township Council, it will be held at the West Windsor Municipal Complex, [271 Clarksville Road, West Windsor, NJ 08550](https://www.google.com/maps/place/271+Clarksville+Road,+West+Windsor,+NJ+08550).



American Legion Post 76 member Gene Freda incises a Star for his father Guerino Freda, a World War I veteran, at the dedication of the American Legion Centennial Memorial, Veterans Day 2016. (Photos courtesy of Peter Hsu, Fotolux.)