

The Eagle Bryan/College Station
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A day of honor

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Eagle photo/Dave McDermand

Vietnam veterans lead the Bryan Rotary Club Veterans Day Parade in downtown Bryan Sunday afternoon.

Veteran Frank Kocman was born just a block away from where a parade filled the downtown Bryan streets Sunday afternoon.

The 82-year old -- who enlisted in the Army in 1944 and served in five countries over an 18-month span during World War II -- said events like the parade he participated in, along with 500 others, encourage those currently serving in the military.

"It's a way for us to pass the torch down to the next generation," Kocman said of the Bryan Rotary Club Veterans Day Parade. "It gives us a chance to show them that there will never be an event like what we saw after Vietnam. It was sad to see so many great people greeted back to our country, after sacrificing their lives, with things thrown at them.

"I never want to see that happen again."

At twice the number from last year's parade, 4,000 people lined the streets to take part in the celebration for military personnel -- both past and present.

"This was not just a Bryan event," said Robin Silva, one of the event organizers. "It was something that everybody from our area, and even some from beyond the community, were able to take part of."

The parade included a reenactment of Gen. George S. Patton leading three convoys, including one similar to the one Patton commanded in during World War II.

John Wilson, who served in the Central Highlands of Vietnam from 1961 to 1962, now is a second commander for the Earl Graham Post No. 159 American Legion, which covers Bryan.

"Parades like this bring together so many different people who have shared a common experience," Wilson said. "To get to serve [through the American Legion] gives me and gives us all great pleasure. To remember what it was like at the age of so many of the young people here today, it's great to share similar experiences."

Other activities Sunday included a military-themed museum, a patriot-themed program by the Brazos Valley Troupe and a live musical performance by Karen Chavez.

"A lot of the people there got to say, 'hey, that's what I used in the military and that's what I worked with,'" Silva said. "The kids and grandkids of our veterans get to see just what it was like for them. And to be able to learn the things

you just don't learn in history classes today. It's the only way our children are going to really understand what the experiences are about."

Among those at the museum were the Daughters of the American Revolution, the United Confederacy and Project HOLD, College Station's Historic Online Library. Proceeds went to the Museum of the American G.I. in College Station, a non-profit organization that provided the fully restored tanks, armored cars and other military vehicles.

Events continue at 6 p.m. Monday at Friendship Church on Southwood Drive in College Station.

Events on Tuesday, which is Veterans Day, include the following:

* 11 a.m. at VFW Post No. 4692: An 11-11 service will be held at the post, at 14475 Harvey Mitchell Parkway in Bryan. For more information, call 823-0550.

* 3 p.m. at the College Station Middle School performance gym: Retired Army Ranger Capt. and former National American Legion Commander John Brieden will speak at a ceremony with performances by the band, choir and orchestra, followed by a reception for all veterans, service members and their families.

* 6 p.m. at Veterans Park in College Station: A Veterans Fellowship Barbecue will raise money for the Museum of the American G.I. and Brazos Valley Veterans Memorial. Tickets are \$8.

The Brazos Valley Veterans Memorial board of directors will dedicate 171 names to the wall of honor. The addition brings the number of names to 4,103.

U.S. Rep. Chet Edwards will provide the keynote address. The event includes a memorial program with members of the Fightin' Texas Aggie Band and Ross Volunteers and a military equipment display.