

American Legion takes possession of tank

By Susan DeMar Lafferty
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Like most anxious adoptive parents, they had been on a waiting list at least three years. They had hoped for a Huey, but didn't complain when it turned out to be a Patton—an M60 Patton.

The baby arrived last Thursday, weighing 60 tons, standing 12 and a half feet tall and measuring 32 feet and four inches long.

"As soon as I saw it, I got goose bumps all over," said Craig Phillips, commander and proud papa—of the Tom Hartung American Legion Post 1977 in New Lenox.

The newest addition to the Legion family is a 48-year old Army tank, now proudly displayed on its property at Edison Drive and Cedar Road beneath the flags.

"Many of our members served during that era, so it has special meaning for them," Phillips said. Their first choice was a helicopter but the government isn't releasing them because of the war, he explained.

Judging by the crowd that came—in walkers, wheelchairs and uniform—to welcome the giant camouflaged combat vehicle, the M60 was a solid choice.

Among the crowd were cousins of Tom Hartung, the Legion's namesake, who was killed in Vietnam in 1966. His first cousin Jill Bojan, of New Lenox, thought her three grandchildren should witness this bit of local and personal history.

"I think (Tom) would be proud to see this. He would try to drive it off. That's the type of guy he was," she said. Hartung most likely trained on one of these.

Manhattan resident Andy Vonvogt was one of the first to inspect the tank, once it was finally in place. "I hitched enough rides on these things," he said.

"I drove one of these tanks. Now, it's a museum piece," said Calvin Jordan, a New Lenox resident who served during peace time in the 1980s. Today, as a member of the Patriot Guard, he volun-



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The first ones to greet and inspect the M60 Patton series-tank in its new environment were Calvin Jordan, of the Patriot Guard, American Legion Post 1977 Commander Craig Phillips and Korean War veteran Andy Vonvogt of Manhattan.

teered to lead the tank through town, from Interstate 80, to Lincoln Highway, down Gougar Road to Laraway Road. "A lot of people were stopping, looking and taking pictures."

After waiting years for this moment, the New Lenox veteran's group was given three weeks to prepare for it. The tank had most recently served in Afghanistan and had been living with a Veterans of Foreign Wars post in Laurel, Miss.. That post lost its lease and had to move, forcing it to give up the M60.

According to Phillips it was three exciting weeks of non-stop phone calls to coordinate the transportation of the 60 ton vehicle, find another company to unload it, get highway permits, obtain certification papers, arrange police escorts, and pour a concrete pad that met US Army specifications.

The tank itself was free because the government retained ownership. As its birth parent, the US Army only requested that it receive pictures every three years to ensure that the American Legion is taking care of it, to prove that it is worthy of being displayed, Phillips said. A public dedication ceremony will be held this fall.

The price to move it through four states was in excess of \$10,000, the commander said, and only the

state of Illinois waived its fee. The Legion will likely have fundraisers to defray expenses. But no one was concerned about that Thursday morning, as they watched for more than two hours as their new armored arrival was unloaded.

"Just to see this brings back memories," said Joe Bi-alek, a Korean War veteran from New Lenox. "This is a good thing for the community. It's good for the kids, who have heard the stories. Maybe they'll get to play around it, but I hope they never have to use one."

When its tracks came to

rest for likely the last time, the crowd erupted in applause.

Paul Chen, an active member of the Legion, took the day off so he wouldn't miss

the arrival of the M60 Patton. He's hoping to find a machine gun to place on top.

He also still hoping for a helicopter. "I need the Huey," he said.

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