

# 30 DAYS OF HONOR ★ *A Salute to Local Vets*

## At the ready

Veteran Melvin Schmidt remembers drills in Germany preparing in case Cold War escalated

By Dan Richter

For Gannett Central Wisconsin Media

**M**elvin Schmidt had already planned on joining the military when he was drafted into the United States Army at the age of 20. Though the Korean War still raged at the time he entered the service, Schmidt found himself stationed in Germany for much of his military career, where he helped keep an eye on Soviet forces.

Raised near Athens and now living in Marshfield, Schmidt recently talked about his time in the service and the Never Forgotten Honor Flight he took last year.

**Q: What did you do in the service and where were you stationed?**

**A:** I was stationed in Germany and was a physical instructor, drill sergeant and section chief with 21 men under me. I also went to small arms school and got chemical and biological warfare training to learn more about the A-bomb. Most of the time we spent at the gun park cleaning the guns, going through our daily routines and that sort of thing. We were roused many times in the night, being told the Russkies were coming, so we'd have to get up, cross the Rhine and set up a line of defense. But every time it was a drill.

**Q: What is your most enduring memory from your time in the service?**

**A:** When I got back from Germany, we took a troop train to Chicago and then I came up to Wausau, where my mother and brother were waiting for me. I arrived back home at 7 in the evening on Christmas Day and they swore they wouldn't open any presents until I was back home, so we had a nice present opening at home that night. We were told back in Germany that we'd be home for Christmas. Some guys made it and some guys didn't.

**Q: What do you most want people to know about the conflict in which you served?**

**A:** We were always on alert since we were in the middle of the Cold War. We'd patrol the border between Germany and the USSR and didn't know what to expect or if they'd ever make a move against us.

**Q: Tell us about your life after the service and how your time in the military affected your civilian life.**

**A:** When I first got back, I started out as an auto mechanic and then got into the Postal Service. I was a letter carrier for a number of years and then became the postmaster of Rib Lake, then Athens, then Nekoosa and finally the officer in charge of Merrill. I was with them for 30-some years, until I retired in 1982.

**Q: What did going on the Honor Flight mean to you?**

**A:** I hadn't been to D.C. before. I did a lot of traveling in the USA, camping with family and what not, but the Honor Flight was the first time I had ever been there, and it was great. I thought the Honor Flight people were so well-organized. I took my son as my guardian, and we were both overwhelmed with it all. There was a lot to see.

### ABOUT MELVIN SCHMIDT

**Age:** 84

**Residence:** Marshfield

**Conflict involved in:** Korean War

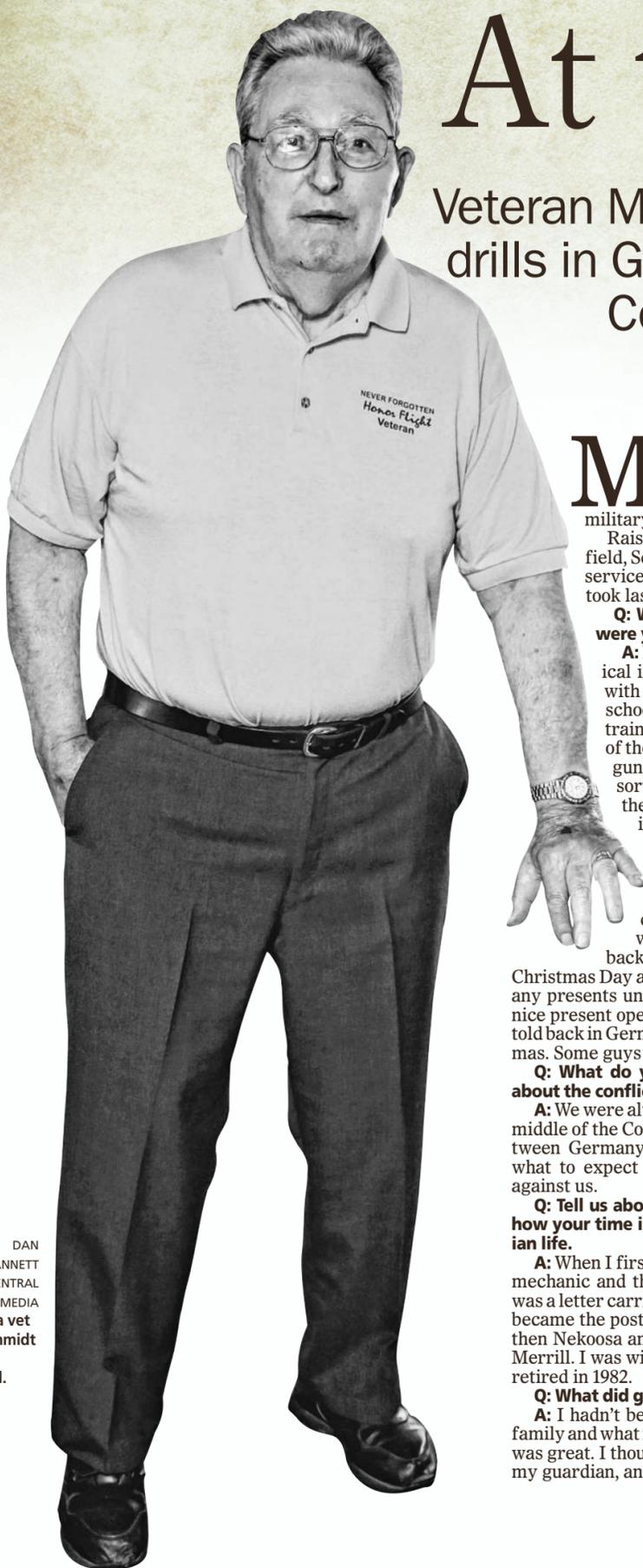
**Military branch:** United States Army

**Years of service:** 1951 to 1954

**Rank upon discharge:** Sergeant



CONTRIBUTED  
Korean War-era vet Melvin Schmidt in his military uniform.



DAN YOUNG/GANNETT CENTRAL WISCONSIN MEDIA  
Korean era vet Melvin Schmidt lives in Marshfield.



### A FLIGHT TO NEVER FORGET

The Central Wisconsin chapter of Never Forgotten Honor Flight celebrates its fifth anniversary this spring. Since April 2010, the Honor Flight program has taken more than 1,700 veterans of World War II, Korea and Vietnam from Central Wisconsin Airport to Washington, D.C., to view the memorials built in honor of their service.

30 Days of Honor is a project of Gannett Central Wisconsin Media to profile veterans who have taken an Honor Flight, or are scheduled, and to encourage more veterans to do so. Profiles will appear each day April 26 through Memorial Day.

Veterans may apply for a free Honor Flight (or loved ones may apply for them) by filling out an application. The only qualification for a veteran to take an Honor Flight is to have served in any branch of the U.S. military during the periods of World War II, the Korean War or Vietnam War. Veterans do not have to have been in combat. The applications and more information are available at <http://www.neverforgottenhonorflight.org>

### SPONSORED BY

