

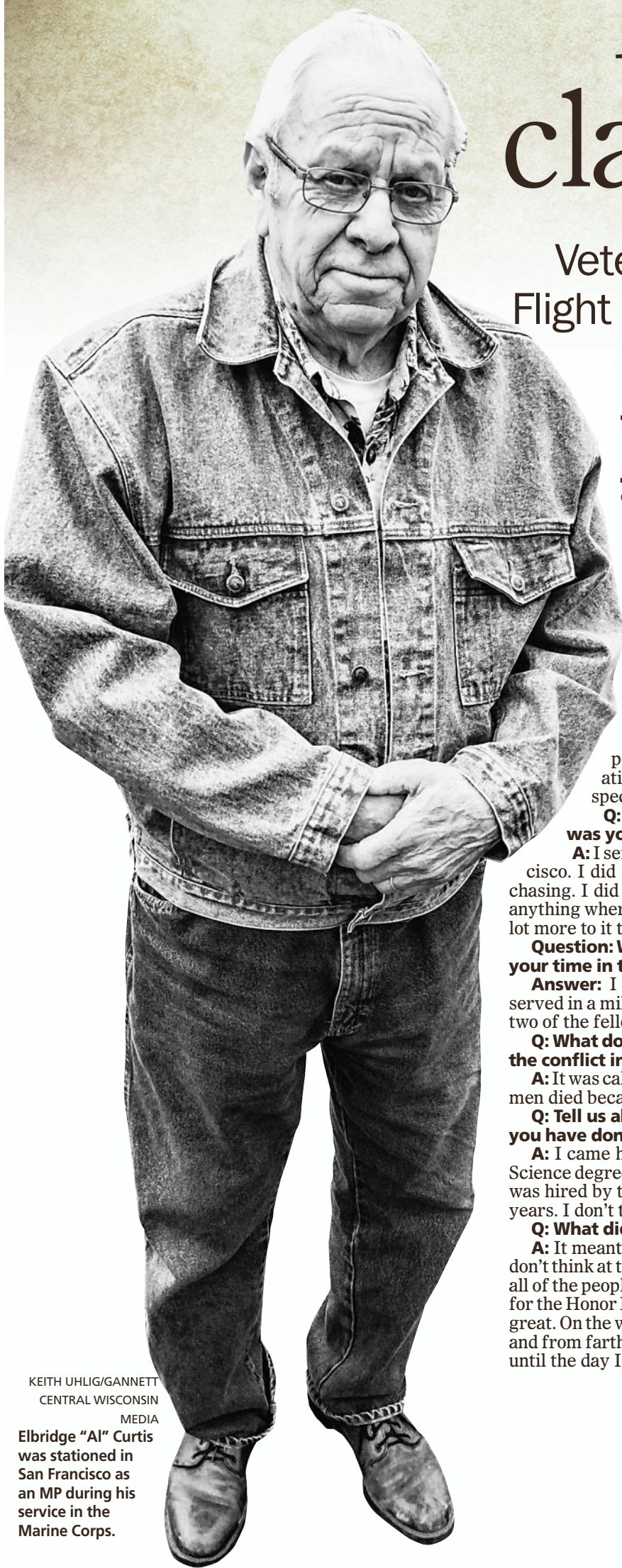
30 DAYS OF HONOR ★ *A Salute to Local Vets*



‘People were clapping for us’

Veteran Elbridge ‘Al’ Curtis says Honor Flight experience created lasting memories

Joy Marquardt
For Gannett Central Wisconsin Media



MERRILL — Sixty years after Elbridge “Al” Curtis returned from the Korean conflict in 1953, he was selected to participate in the trip of a lifetime. Curtis and his brother Hugh enlisted in the United States Marine Corps in 1951. As brothers, it was only fitting they experience the Never Forgotten Honor Flight together in 2013.

“The two of us spent most of our lives together and we went on the Honor Flight together, that was kind of unique,” said Curtis, 86.

Originally from Poynette, Curtis was stationed in San Francisco as member of the Military Police during his service in the Marine Corps. It was on a leave of absence to attend his sister’s wedding that Curtis decided to marry his longtime sweetheart, Marlene. The couple has been married for 62 years.

After his time in service Curtis completed college and became a science teacher for the Merrill Area Public Schools and managed the Merrill School Forest. As manager, he developed curriculum to incorporate subjects such as history and creative writing at the facility and started a special program for the handicapped.

Q: What did you do in the service? What was your job and where did you do it?

A: I served with the Military Police in San Francisco. I did all sorts of guard duty and some prison chasing. I did MP investigating for part of a year and anything where you had to carry a Colt 45. There was a lot more to it than people realize.

Question: What is your most enduring memory of your time in the service?

Answer: I remember the people I served with. I served in a military police unit. I’m still in contact with two of the fellows. Some I served with are dead now.

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

A: It was called a conflict, not a war. It was something our country thought we needed to do and 50,000 men died because of it. It didn’t accomplish a lot. There’s still a North and South Korea.

Q: Tell us about your life after the service and how your time in the military influenced what you have done since.

A: I came home and worked on the farm for a year and then finished college. I got a Bachelor of Science degree from UWSP in 1957 and a master’s degree in the ‘80s. I ended up as a school teacher and was hired by the Merrill school district to teach science and to run the school forest. I did that for 33 years. I don’t think my military experience influenced what I did.

Q: What did the Honor Flight mean to you?

A: It meant that I could participate in something I would never have gotten to see in my lifetime. I don’t think at this stage of my life I would have ever gone to Washington, D.C. The amount of respect by all of the people we met was something I never expected. People were clapping for us. If it hadn’t been for the Honor Flight, I don’t think I would ever have experienced that emotion. It was something pretty great. On the way back, we had Mail Call and we got letters from family, friends and school kids nearby and from farther away. I still have some of those letters from schoolkids. I’ll keep some of those letters until the day I die.

ABOUT ELBRIDGE ‘AL’ CURTIS

Age: 86
Residence: Merrill
Conflict involved in: Korean conflict
Military branch: United States Marine Corps
Years of service: 1951-1953
Rank upon discharge: Sergeant



Curtis’ Military Police ID card.

CONTRIBUTED IMAGE

KEITH UHLIG/GANNETT
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MEDIA

Elbridge “Al” Curtis was stationed in San Francisco as an MP during his service in the Marine Corps.



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 1,828 veterans of World War II, Korea and Vietnam and 1,106 guardians 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>

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