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Bernie Markey, grand marshal of the 2017 Summit Hill Memorial Day Parade, proudly displays a shadow box recognizing his military service that contains an American flag that flew over Baghdad.
CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

The Summit Hill Memorial Day Parade Committee has selected a Korean War veteran to be the grand marshal of the 2017 parade, Carbon County's largest tribute to America on Memorial Day.

Bernard C. Markey, 123 E. Walter St., Summit Hill, will be the guest of honor, leading the four-division parade that will step off at approximately 11 a.m., following the traditional memorial service that will begin at 10 a.m. in Ludlow Park.

"When the committee met with (American Legion) Post 316 members, Bernie was nominated, and everyone agreed he was a great choice," said Bob Crampsie, longtime member of the parade committee. "The Markeys have been a prominent family in the community for a long time, and Bernie has certainly been a popular face in our town for many years. We are happy to recognize him and his service to our country as a Korean War veteran."

Markey will be among the speakers at the memorial program in the park, after which time he will ring the former Summit Hill High School bell in the park, signaling the start of the parade, and then board a convertible that will take him around the community as the leader of the parade.

"I'll tell you, I was in panic mode," he said about when parade organizers visited him to ask him

to accept the grand marshal's role. "I'm not used to that kind of stuff, and couldn't stop thinking about it," he recalled. "But," he added, "I'm overwhelmed. I don't know how to explain it, because nothing like this has ever happened to me. As time passes, I guess I'll finally realize what a privilege this is, but, for now, I'm totally out in left field. The only thing is, I wish my mom and dad could be here to seem. They would be very proud."

Markey, 81, was born in Summit Hill, a son of the late Charles and Anna (Bobick) Markey, He attended the former St. Joseph's Parochial School, Summit Hill, until moving to Lansford with his mother, and graduated in 1953 from the former Lansford High School, where he played basketball and football.

After graduation, he lived in Harrisburg while working for a furniture store, before volunteering for the draft in 1954.

"I'm glad I volunteered for the draft," he said. "Eventually I would have been drafted, but, ultimately, serving in the military was a good experience. I was never sorry that I did it. I was only 18 at the time. A lot of guys were 18, but maybe 20-21 maturity-wise. I was reversed, perhaps maybe having a 16-year-old's maturity level, and it was scary in the beginning, but, overall, I enjoyed it."

Markey had his basic training at Fort Dix, New Jersey, and then remained there for 13 weeks while being trained as a radio operator. Later, he was stationed for 18 weeks at Fort Benning, Georgia, where he underwent advanced communications training. Eventually, he was assigned to the Far East Command with the 24th Infantry Division, spending 13 months in Incheon, Korea, and then being honorably discharged in 1956.

He and the former Anna Gavula of Mahanoy City married in 1958 and are the parents of four, including Charles (wife Cheryl) of Wellsville, York County; Margaret Mary, wife of John Storch of Boiling Springs, Cumberland County (parents of Tyler and Aaron); Bernard Jr. (wife Marilyn) of Summit Hill; and Jack, who served for 20 years in the Navy (wife Staci) of Dillsburg (parents of John Steven and Robert).

An avid basketball player in his younger days, Markey played in numerous civic and industrial leagues and was a member of several championship teams. He later coached CYO basketball

for the former St. Joe's of Summit Hill.

Besides his brief stint in Harrisburg, his work experience includes being a service station attendant on the Pennsylvania Turnpike, working for the former aluminum plant in Nesquehoning, spending eight years with the former Kiddie Kloes garment factory in Lansford; working for Textile Machine in Reading, and then being employed at a plastics plant in Delano.

In 1967, Markey began employment with the U.S. Postal Service at the Summit Hill Post Office. He retired there in 2000 after 20 years of service, and later worked as a parking attendant for Carbon County, until recently.

From 1981 to 2004, he was the custodian of St. Joseph Catholic Church, Summit Hill, where he was also responsible for its cemetery maintenance.

Markey and his wife are members of St. Joseph Catholic Church of the Panther Valley, Summit Hill. He is a life member of American Legion Post 316, Summit Hill, and the 24th Infantry Division.

Markey said this year's Memorial Day will be a special one for him. "I think back on world conflicts, from the World Wars to Korea, to Vietnam and the Gulf Wars, and it'll be an honor to represent all of the men and women who served our country," he said, adding that his brother-in-law, Steve Gavula, was a POW for 33 months in Korea.