

WORLD WAR II VETERANS UNITE

By Laura Gwinn
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COOKEVILLE – War can certainly unite men and create lasting friendships. That has proven true with the members of the 728th Amphibian Tractor Battalion who recently gathered for a reunion in Cookeville.

“This reunion takes place every year since the mid-1960s,” Daryhl Murphy, son of veteran Lloyd Murphy, said. “I recall going to these reunions when I was a young child.



It was such a tremendous gathering.”

There were only three veterans who made it to this reunion – Lloyd Murphy from Cookeville, Rex Gass from Oak Ridge and Gabe Tribble from Grenada MS.

(Pictured: Veterans of the 728th Amphibian Tractor Battalion recently gathered for their annual reunion at the Baymont Inn. They are, from left, 93-year-old Lloyd Murphy of Cookeville; 89-year-old Gabe

Tribble of Grenada, MS; and 91-year-old Rex Gass of Oak Ridge, TN. Photo by Ty Kernea).

“We started out with 650-700 members,” Gass said.

According to his son, Allen “Rex” Gass, there are though to be around eight surviving members in the U. S. now.

These reunions have been held all over the region, from Nashville, Indianapolis, Gatlinburg, Memphis an other places.

“There are at least 1,500 World War II veterans dying per day in the United States,” Murphy said.

The 728th amphibian Tractor Battalion served in the South Pacific, with their job to take the infantrymen from the ships to shore suing equipment that traveled underwater right to shore.

“I remember being on Okinawa and being bombed as we settled in,” Lloyd Murphy said.

“It was a Easter Sunday and the group was sleeping in tents when the bombs started whistling overhead. We had the tents set up between two tractors and I remember the bomb hitting that tent. I turned the mattress on top of me and I believe that’s what saved me.”

The men still recall to this day the names of those mechanics who died as they look through the binders and binders of documentation taken over the years.

When the war ended, they were on Mendoro in the Philippines when they got the call the war was over.

“We were sitting there, waiting for the go ahead when the call came in that the war was over,” Gass said. “the bomb was dropped.”

“We all went in the same unit and all left together,” Lloyd Murphy said.