

**Gulf War Prompts Town's First Parade in 25 Years**

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699 words

3 July 1991

The Associated Press

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NEWTON, Iowa (AP) - It took a desert war and encouragement from President Bush, but folks in Newton are preparing their first Fourth of July parade in at least 25 years.

They haven't forgotten how to throw a patriotic bash.

There will be a band, 50 to 60 floats, balloons, color guards and lots of red, white and blue.

A real estate company has enlisted the Boy Scouts to help plant 2,000 miniature American flags along the one-mile parade route. The Chamber of Commerce offered about 2,000 free posters reading "Welcome home troops" along with an American flag. Those are all gone.

Much of the hoopla is for the 90 or so Jasper County troops who served in the Persian Gulf War. But it's also to honor other veterans - primarily those who were in Korea and Vietnam - who never got a parade when they came home.

"Without a doubt the Persian Gulf War and the return not too long ago of those service people has spearheaded all this," Mayor Alvin Borchers said.

"But this is going to be a day where we're going to recognize many, many others who haven't been given their due. Maybe it's high time they did," he said.

Vietnam veterans are hurrying to get their float ready.

It's a helicopter, made to one-quarter scale from napkins, chicken wire and wood, in front of a replica of the Vietnam Memorial wall in Washington. The front and rear rotor blades will whirl. Music from the 1960s and '70s will blare from a tape player.

On the float are camouflaged packs, canteens, boots and ammo boxes.

"The helicopters were Vietnam. They got your chow, your water. They lifted you to your different assaults and you got yourself hauled out on them after being wounded," said Bob Wooldridge, who served 19 months and two days with the 173rd Army Airborne.

Townsppeople, especially the old timers, are eager. They think 25 years is a long wait for a Fourth of July parade.

"It's about time," 74-year-old Millie Chapman said over lunch at the town cafe. "I think Newton has let things slide too much. They don't have enough of this type of thing for the kids. Kids like parades."

Thursday's parade starts at 9 a.m., followed by speeches, games and activities on the courthouse square and then fireworks - more than \$5,000 worth - that evening.

"We decided to do this to welcome home the troops, and President Bush mentioned a few months ago that it would be a good time to have this, so we're doing what we're told," said Rick Baker, executive vice president of the Newton Chamber of Commerce.

Before Operation Desert Storm, Baker said, there wasn't much interest in having an old-fashioned July Fourth parade in the east-central Iowa community of 15,000.

The Maytag Co., the giant appliance maker, decided years ago to schedule its annual two-week shut down to coincide with the holiday. So that's when 3,500 assembly line workers took their vacation, many of them out of town, Baker said.

But the war puffed up the town's patriotic spirit. Gulf War veterans have been treated like heroes in Newton.

Their pictures and biographies are in a 24-page special edition of the Newton Daily News. They'll each be presented with a certificate from the local chapter of the Red Cross in lieu of an American flag. Flag manufacturers can't keep up with demand and Marlys De Vries, the executive director of the Red Cross chapter, says they won't be in until the fall.

The photos that were in the Daily News also are on display in the rotunda of the county courthouse.

Paul Blanchard, 24, who drove a 5,000-gallon fuel truck on the front lines during the war, says he's still being treated as someone special.

"I got a pretty good welcome when I came back home," Blanchard said. "People buy you drinks. I'll probably get pretty well drunk Thursday night."

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