

# Korean veterans get medals some 50 years late

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SPECIAL WRITER

Tears of joy flowed recently as family and friends watched 10 members of Naval Patrol Squadron 731 accept the Distinguished Flying Cross, the highest aviation honor bestowed by the U.S. Navy.

The honors came nearly 50 years after the squadron's outstanding performance in Korea.

William Peterson of Livonia, Michael McDonnell of Farmington Hills, Raymond DeGroote of West Bloomfield, Pete Giorio of Allen Park and John Reardon of Grosse Pointe Farms were among then Michigan men who received medals Jan. 18 during an emotional ceremony in Livonia's Her's Leather Bottle.

In addition, squadron members from California, Tennessee, Florida and Arizona traveled to Livonia for the special program which recognized the forgotten Naval Reserve Squadron that served during the Korean Conflict.

The men, now in their late 60s and 70s, finally received medals they earned while serving in Korea during the early 1950s.

Patrol Squadron 731 was Naval Reserve unit that drilled at Naval Air Station Grosse Ile in the late 1940s. The squadron was recalled to active duty in September 1950 and reported to Korea in January 1951. The squadron returned in August 1951 and received no recognition at the time, although the active duty squadron which preceded

them received Distinguished Flying Crosses, Air Medals and gold stars in lieu of second and third air medals.

The squadron deployed again in 1952 and this time members were given awards as they were earned. The unit was redesignated VP-48 in February 1953.

## 'Forgotten war'

"Some call the Korean Conflict the forgotten war and you could say these men were the forgotten squadron," said Commander Gary Dye, commanding officer of Navy Recruiting District Michigan, during the awards presentation.

Peterson, who hadn't seen some of the men gathered in the room since 1952 in Korea, said it was a joy just being with these people again. His medal, earned for completing 37 flights from Feb. 8, 1951, to Aug. 5, 1951, in Korea, was a bonus.

"It's something I didn't expect," he said.

As for any bitterness for having to wait almost five decades to finally get the medal, Peterson said: "I didn't give it much thought. With working and so on it didn't give me much time to think about it."

Farmington Hills resident Michael McDonnell said he had "a great feeling of accomplishment."

"We were called out for active duty against our will, but that's what we were training for and we really can't complain," said McDonnell.

The Korean Conflict was a three-year police action that was officially over in July 1953. American troops fought to



**Special honor:** The award came nearly 50 years late but members of Patrol Squadron 731 received their Distinguished Flying Crosses in a special ceremony Jan. 18. Commander Gary Dye (top from left) made the presentation. Honorees are (from left) Frank Phillips, Fallbrook, Calif.; Pete Giorio, Allen Park; Michael McDonnell, Farmington Hills; Andrew Yancey, Memphis, Tenn.; John Doyle, Sarasota, Fla.; (bottom from left) John Reardon, Grosse Pointe Farms; Raymond DeGroote, West Bloomfield; Charles Lipari, Peoria, Ariz.; Robert Bachmer, Whittier, Calif.; and William Peterson, Livonia. A photo (below) served as a reminder of the squadron in 1951.

defend South Korea from communist invasion when North Korea crossed the 38th Parallel.

"The 46-year delay in presenting these awards in no way diminishes their values or significance," said Dye.

"These awards recognize the dangers and challenges you faced, and the achievement you made during those arduous months you spent in Korea," added Dye.

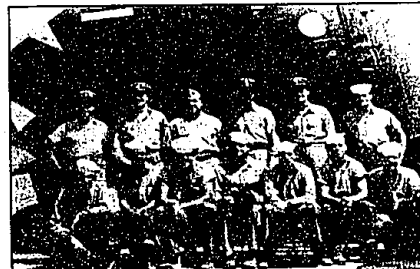
## Special effort

Many of the men in Squadron 731 left family, friends and jobs to take part in the war. Hope was fading that they would ever

see the medals, until crew members Andrew Yancey, who now lives in Memphis, Tenn., and Bill Masser of Detroit made sure they weren't forgotten. Masser previously received an Air Medal with two gold stars.

Many rounds of applause and a standing ovation during the ceremony showed a tremendous outpouring of gratitude for their work.

Their diligence included an eight-year period when Yancey compiled 491 pages of painstaking documentation. He overcame setbacks in a tireless effort to



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