

Meriden

Local man headed to veterans hall of fame

By Dan Brechlin

Record-Journal staff **MERIDEN** — It was never William “Bill” Godburn’s intention to join the country’s armed forces. But when he got a call in early 1943 that a man who had been drafted did not meet military requirements, he had no choice.

A short time later the 18-year-old was sent to England as a member of the Eighth Army Air Corps. The fighting started as soon as he arrived.

“The first one came in and bang,” he exclaimed, explaining his first night manning a large machine gun. “Then another, bang.” What most servicemen thought were bombs, turned out to be “flash bang” – used by the enemy to light up the night sky for reconnaissance photographs. Godburn stayed at his post and realized it was not going to be a peaceful tour overseas.

There were near-death experiences, nights spent in the frigid cold and numerous bombing missions in Germany where Godburn had relatives. After his three years in the service, Godburn returned home with a different perspective and a desire to help his community.

“Since I was 18 and right up until today, right now, I wanted to serve the country and serve the city,” said the 88-year-old Godburn during an interview at his South Meriden home.

Godburn’s service will be recognized today as he and other state veterans are inducted into the Connecticut Veterans Hall of Fame at the state Capitol.

“I was shocked,” Godburn said about hearing he was being inducted. “It’s a real honor.”

After helping with the liberation of France and finishing his time in Europe, Godburn returned to Meriden. He eventually became a firefighter and advanced to assistant fire marshal and then fire marshal.

Throughout the years, Godburn has also served in numerous capacities with local Boy Scout troops, youth baseball and parent-teacher organizations. Godburn has also remained active with local veterans groups, various boards, commissions and civic groups. To honor those from Meriden who have served, Godburn created a book of photos, articles and notes about local veterans. One of the copies sits on display at the Meriden Public Library.

“I didn’t do that for me,” he explains. “I did it so that kids today can go there and look up information for a report. Hopefully the future generations come across it and find family members or just learn from it.”

Godburn’s service to his country and community prompted state Sen. Leonard F. Suzio to recommend him for the honor.

“His service to community didn’t stop with his military service,” Suzio said. “He has a long history of getting involved and helping this community out ... I’ve always enjoyed Bill in the years that I’ve known him and he’s done an awful lot. I’m very happy it worked out and he will get the recognition he so rightly deserves.”

Though he did not initially want to join the military, Godburn reflected, stating that it is something that he enjoyed and would recommend. Godburn is proud of his accomplishments, hanging most of them on the walls of his basement in the form of pictures or medals. “If you’re physically capable, it’s a great opportunity for a young man if that’s what they want to do,” Godburn said. “I was forced into it and back then, people were so ticked off at the Japanese that they did it willingly. But you meet a lot of good guys

there and it's a good experience."

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Dave Zajac / Record-Journal

South Meriden resident William "Bill" Godburn, who served with the U.S. Army Air Corps in World War II, will be recognized Wednesday in Hartford where he and others from across the state are being inducted into the Connecticut Veterans Hall of Fame at the state Capitol.

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