

## Daughter shares Dale H. Williams' Korean War story

By Mardi Suhs CADILLAC NEWS  
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"Finally, he's being recognized," said Kathy Pifer of Marion. Her father, Dale H. Williams, was held in a North Korean prisoner of war camp for almost three years. "He was a very courageous man."

The Korean War Veterans Association of Cadillac, Dale H. Williams Post 1996, Amvets Post 110, has dwindling membership. There was no answer when the Cadillac News left messages.

This summer marked the 70th Anniversary of the end of the Korean War. By now, few people recognize Williams' name. This story is meant to bring a war hero to life through the memories of his daughter, Kathy Pifer, 68, of Marion.

Pifer was relieved when her father's military service was recognized during an event on Sept. 16 at the Michigan Vietnam Veterans Memorial Island Park in Mount Pleasant. Four former POWs and MIAs received long overdue recognition.

Pifer's father, Sgt. Dale H. Williams, was one of those honored. He was held captive in North Korea for 32 months. He was in the Army Reserves when he was called to active duty in October 1950. He had just turned 21.

Williams had only been married three months when he was called to active duty. He and Ardath had just learned they were expecting their first child.

Pifer said her father "shielded" her from his war experiences. But in a 1995 media interview he revealed details of his capture for the first time. Later, he shared his story with two grandchildren for school assignments; Kelli Pifer Schutte and Garrett Schutte. Here's what he revealed.

Williams' unit was attacked at 3 a.m. on the morning of Jan. 4, 1951. He described the three hour battle as "human wave after human wave of casualties." When the officers raised a white flag, he thought he would never make it home alive.

"My grandson wrote a story for school," Pifer said. "My father told him that when they were captured they thought they were going to be shot."

He was one of only 15 survivors from his regiment. The captors tied their hands behind their backs and put ropes over their necks. They began walking in the dark of night in what became known as "death marches." They walked for six weeks to Pyoktong in North Korea, Camp 2 on the Yalu River.

If they stumbled or got sick, they were shot.

Williams spent the next six months in a camp with a death rate of 50%. He was later moved to a second camp until his release. His weight dropped from 180 to 80 pounds. He suffered from frozen feet, hepatitis, infections, and continuous indoctrination.



In camp the men were crammed into small rooms and went months without showers. Many died from frostbite, malnutrition and dysentery. He watched some purposely stop eating, choosing instead to die. Williams was on burial duty twice a week and "watched hundreds of men die or be killed off."

But he was determined to live, to see his wife again some day.

On July 27, 1953, after almost three years in captivity, a cease fire treaty was signed and the men were released. Williams spent months recuperating in a German hospital before he could go home. He was released on Feb. 8, 1954. Soon he was on a transport ship. On his 24th birthday he passed under the Golden Gate Bridge. A few days later he was reunited with his wife and met his 3-year old son.

"We had a pretty good childhood," Pifer said. "We just knew he wasn't well, There were times when he was very quiet. We knew he had gone through a lot. We just lived around it."

See PTSD on V-7

Pifer's father worked for Consumer's Power until his heart attack at 52. And then his kidney's started failing.

"This was right about when I first heard him yelling out in the night," she said. "He would have dreams. And then I saw him (having a PTSD incident). He was yelling in the hospital, he was in ICU for his kidneys. He tore his IVs out and was yelling for me to get behind the mattress. That was the worst I had seen. This was getting towards the end."

Williams died on Jan. 17, 2002 at 72.

"He had PTSD but the nobody diagnosed the Korean War veterans with that," Pifer said. "There has been a lot of recognition of my father around Marion. There's a stone here now, a memorial for all the different wars and his name and my son's are there."

On the Sunday after Veteran's Day, Pifer will be in church with her husband Steve. And as she does once a year, she will read about the meaning of Veteran's day to the congregation.

“Sometimes I think the respect for Veterans Day is not there,” she said. “If these younger kids knew what was going on, maybe there would be better respect for our veterans.”

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