

Truman' tips hat to veterans

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By Gabe Licht, Daily Reporter Staff

Former President Harry S. Truman first learned of the Clay County Fair by reading a Henry Luce article in Life Magazine. Impersonator Raymond Starzmann brought Truman to life for hundreds gathered for the Veterans Appreciation Ceremony at the fair Monday morning.

"It is a great honor to honor all of you," Starzmann said. "Quite frankly, we may not be here today without the sacrifices you made."

The presentation emphasized the importance of history.

"If we don't have a historical perspective, we end up planting cut flowers," he said. "The only people who don't make mistakes are those who don't make decisions."

One of the toughest decisions Truman ever made was to drop atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. According to Starzmann's portrayal, Gen. George Marshall estimated that land invasions would have resulted in an additional 2.5 million American and Japanese casualties. Still, deciding to use the atomic bomb was the second toughest decision Truman made, next to committing troops to Korea.

Truman first learned of the atomic bomb the same day President Franklin D. Roosevelt died. Though he expected Roosevelt to die in office, Truman was stunned to learn of his predecessor's death just 82 days into the term.

"Mrs. Roosevelt said, 'Harry, I have bad news: The president died today,'" he said. "I was stunned. I asked, 'Is there anything I can do for you?' She said, 'The question is is there anything we can do for you? Because, you're in trouble now.'"

Within those first three months in office, half of all American casualties of World War II occurred.

"As we got closer to victory, fighting would be fiercer and loss of life greater," he said. "For me, it (dropping the bombs) was a moral alternative. The war was over."

Truman was highly criticized for his decisions and everyone from New York Times to Gallup was predicting he would lose the White House in 1948.

"I called (Dwight) Eisenhower up and said, 'The Democrats want you to run; I'll step aside,'" he said. "He said he wanted no part of politics."

At that point, Truman declared there would be a Democrat in the White House for four more years as he crisscrossed the country talking about foreign policy and equal rights, as he was the first president to establish the Civil Rights Commission. He was also an advocate of education and is quoted as saying, "If your vision is one year, plant grain. If your vision is 10 years, plant trees. If your vision is 100 years, plant education."

Truman went on to win with 303 electoral votes to Thomas Dewey's 189.

"You can have principles, keep them, go out and work hard to protect them and you can win," he said.

Considering Truman was a World War I veteran himself, his final words, through Starzmann, made perfect sense.

"I take my hat off to all of you who served this country," he said. "Thank you very much for letting me be here today. God bless you."

The ceremony also included a patriotic medley, including the fight songs of each military branch, sung by the Spencer High School choir and two patriotic songs by Sherwin Linton.

"I am spiritually and patriotically impressed with the performance of these young people," Linton said. "Our young people get a bad rep. They showed they deserve all the credit they could possibly be given."

At the conclusion of the ceremony, outgoing Clay County Fair Manager Phil Hurst was honored for his military service and efforts in coordinating Veterans Appreciation Day. Hurst received a Bronze Star and two Purple Hearts for his service during the Vietnam War.

Those in attendance applauded as Hurst accepted a plaque and proceeded to hug Clay County Veterans Affairs Director Joan Waller, who had presented it to him.



Former President Harry S. Truman, portrayed by Raymond Starzmann, addresses hundreds gathered for Veterans Appreciation Ceremony at the Clay County Fair Monday morning. (Photo by Randy M. Cauthron)

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Members of the Iowa National Guard present the flags of each U.S. military branch, while the Spencer High School choir sings a medley of patriotic tunes, including each branch's fight song. (Photo by Randy M. Cauthron)

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Outgoing Clay County Fair Manager Phil Hurst hugs Clay County Veterans Affairs Director Joan Waller after being presented with a plaque for his military service and efforts in coordinating Veterans Appreciation Day. Hurst received a Bronze Star and two Purple Hearts for his service during the Vietnam War. (Photo by Gabe Licht)

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Members of the Spencer High School choir sing a patriotic medley during the Veterans Appreciation Ceremony Monday morning. Musician Sherwin Linton, who also performed during the ceremony, said he was "spiritually and patriotically impressed with the performance of these young people." (Photo by Randy M. Cauthron)

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