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"Sweet Land of Liberty" Parade to Honor Vets

Shawn Haughney's mission while serving with the U.S. Army was to keep the Cold War from heating up.

A crypto-communications specialist, Haughney was just a teen-ager when he served on the border separating West Germany and the Soviet-bloc in the early 1980s. Although it was not a shooting war, Haughney and his fellow soldiers patrolling the border took their job with deadly seriousness, always packing live rounds and grenades should trouble unexpectedly erupt.

A commanding officer once said of soldiers like Haughney: Your service won't result in any grand parades, decorations or trips to the White House. But your vigilance ultimately will be rewarded. The prediction came true in 1989, when the Berlin Wall came down, the Soviet Union began crumbling and communism in Europe faded into history.

To honor his military service, Haughney has been named grand marshal of the annual City of Perris Veteran's Day Parade, which takes place on Nov. 9.

The theme for the 2013 parade is "Sweet Land of Liberty." The parade begins at 10 a.m. at Fourth and D Streets and ends at Perris City Hall, San Jacinto Avenue and D. Pre-parade festivities kick-off at 9:15 a.m. Trophies will be awarded for the best marching band, drill team, float and vehicle.

The first 150 spectators will receive a free t-shirt and hand-held American flag.

"I am honored and humbled to be chosen grand marshal," Haughney said. "When I think about a grand marshal, I think of someone like John Wayne. I'm not John Wayne."

Haughney, 52, served in the Army from 1979 to 1985.

From his observation post on the border, Haughney could look into the Communist world. While he stared into that forbidding land, border guards on the other side stared at him. Once in a while, Haughney would hear shots, gunfire to prevent someone from trying to crash into West Germany and freedom. Part of his patrol sweep took him near agricultural lands behind the Iron Curtain. He once saw a farmer plowing a field just across the border, guarded at gunpoint by a sentry to make sure he didn't try to cross. During a trip to the border by a busload of German school children, a communist-border guard became antsy and pointed his gun at the visitors, prompting Haughney and his fellow soldiers to point back. For a few tense seconds, both sides waited for the other to start shooting before cooler heads prevailed.

"It came close to being a major international incident," he said.

After leaving the Army as a sergeant, Haughney moved to Perris and set up a locksmith company, Perris Lock & Key. He served 15 years on the City's Public Safety Commission for 15 years before stepping down earlier in 2013. He continues to serve as a volunteer on the Perris Citizens Patrol.

Parade organizer Joanne Evans, a former Marine, said the Perris Veteran's Day Parade honors members of the armed services "past, present and future." She said the City's relationship with the military dates back to the late 1800s when Civil War veterans of the Grand Army of the Republic marched down D Street. It's a learning experience for young and old, she said.

"It gives people the opportunity to learn what our veterans have done for this community and this country," she said. Perris Mayor Daryl Busch, who served in the Navy, called the Veteran's Day Parade always draws a large and enthusiastic crowd. The 2013 Veteran's Day Parade takes on added meaning as the City is about to unveil the first batch of honorees in a newly created Military Banner program. Banners of Perris men and women currently serving will be hoisted on D Street in the next week or so.

"We owe our veterans a lot," Busch said. "They make it possible so we can enjoy things like parades."

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