

# The Bandera PROPHEET

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Bandera and Lakehills American Legions team together to celebrate Veterans Day

By Ron Clarke  
The Bandera Prophet

A crisp, chilly, and cloudy Veterans Day, much like the beaches of Normandy in World War II, greeted approximately 400 veterans, their families, and appreciative Bandera County residents, on the Bandera County Courthouse grounds to commemorate the 21st annual “Bandera Honors Veterans” Veterans Day Celebration, which began mid-morning on Veterans Day.

The attendees passed a bench dedicated to the Bandera County veterans of Desert Storm to gather and celebrate local veterans on the courthouse steps. The large crowd showed that Bandera County values its veterans as the annual celebration provides a platform for community members to come together, recognize the contributions of local veterans, and express gratitude for their service in a more personal way as many attendees and veterans knew each other and those around them. The annual Bandera Honors Veterans program also serves as an opportunity to educate the younger generation about the importance of military service and the sacrifices made by veterans, as well as allow the entire Bandera County to show its appreciation for our veterans military service. It was obvious in the large crowd today that in Bandera County and the Texas Hill Country a sense of gratitude, responsibility, and respect for those who have served in the armed forces flourishes.

Veterans Day in the United States and Bandera County is observed on Nov. 11 each year. The date commemorates the armistice signed between the Allies and Germany, which effectively ended World War I.

The armistice took effect on the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month in 1918, and that moment is often referred to as the "eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month." Today's celebration was occurring at the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month on the courthouse lawn.

The event opened with a soul-stirring rendition of the "Star Spangled Banner," by Jennifer D'Spain, followed by a rousing "action" speech from American Legion Post 157 Commander Army Colonel (retired) Susan Junker, on behalf of the Bandera American Legion and the Lakehills American Legion Posts. In her speech, Col. Junker cited the action taken by Bandera County veterans to protect our nation and acknowledged the action of local groups such as the Bandera High School Junior ROTC, the Bandera County Commissioners Court, and local sponsors of the event for helping to ensure the action of thanking the Veterans who attended.

In her speech, she talked about how we in Bandera County take "action." Action by "each of us by flying the flag with pride, checking on a nearby veteran, guiding a veteran or their survivors to the Bandera County veterans service officer, or to a local Legion for assistance, watching for signs of suicide, sending care packages to our local military personnel, and standing for our national anthem. Proper action by proper observance of our national U.S. flag, gently reminding those who have somehow forgotten when they fail to find their heart with their hand. Our military is in action every day. While they work hard to protect our rights and freedoms, our very opportunities, it is up to us to show action and to act, to teach our youth, and engage in our great democracy by voting.

She quoted Lee Greenwood's famous song, "God Bless the USA" when she stated in her speech, "I thank my lucky stars to be livin' here today, 'cause the flag still stands for freedom and they can't take that away!"

She closed her speech by thanking the veterans of many wars.

Bagpipes sounded over the event as the San Antonio Fife & Drum provided musical renditions of each military services song. Then, American Legion Chaplain Chris Dion, acting as Emcee, acknowledged

the service of the veteran attendees by having them stand and be recognized for their service in World War II, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, the Cold War including Grenada, Desert Shield and Desert Storm and the War on Terrorism. He also acknowledged the active-duty personnel around the world who are protecting us all even now.

TSgt Leonard Anderson, a retired USAF Security Forces Canine Handler, gave a speech talking about how he was injured by an explosive device while deployed. Of note in his speech was the camaraderie he felt with troops and veterans of other services. He stated that depictions of war in the movies “are very real – and they got it right when you hear the ping of shots...the last thing I heard was a ping and then my world went dark.”

He and his canine partner were attacked by an explosive device, and he was rendered unconscious. He talked further how he was saved by other members of the military who were with him that day, stating, “I don’t even know their names! They did for me what each of us would always do for each other. We cover for each other – then and even now as veterans as shown here in this large group today.”

TSgt Anderson was retired from military service due to the injuries he received on the battlefield. Injuries included trauma to his extremities including the loss of his left hand, fingers from his right hand, abdominal injuries, a broken eye socket and shrapnel throughout his body.

His canine partner Azza was uninjured in the blast and found her way to him. Even now, Azza is retired and continues to be with Anderson as his service dog, so together in battle and now in civilian life, both are military service veterans. Before his retirement, Anderson was one of the few canine handlers to return from his severe injuries to become an instructor at the 341st TRS Military Working Dog School at Lackland AFB.

Bandera County veterans then boarded the parade floats of the Bandera American Legion Post and the Lakehills American Legion Post to participate in the Bandera Honors Parade through downtown Bandera. A

military Color Guard fronted the parade, followed by Veterans American Legion floats, horse mounted Color Guard, bands, numerous local non-profit and political organizations, a vintage 1980s United States Air Force patrol car, and fire equipment from the Castle Lake Ranch and Lake Shore VFDs.

After the parade, the floats and the crowds returned to the courthouse grounds to enjoy a true Texas BBQ with all the trimmings. The event was free to all veterans and their families and hosted by the Bandera American Legion Post 157.

At 6 p.m., on Veterans Day, the American Legion Post 410 hosted a free dinner for veterans and their families at their Post in Lakehills.

Commander Jim Schledorn and Chaplain Mike Mikrantz opened the event with a welcome and a prayer. The menu included a moist pork loin, mashed potatoes, green beans, and homemade pumpkin cake and whipped topping. That event was attended by about 40 people, who enjoyed being together to celebrate the commitment of local Lakehills and Bandera County veterans.

In his benediction, Chaplain Mikrantz made special note of the “22 a day.” When asked he states that this references the 22 veterans who die by suicide each day, on average, in the United States. He closed the event and Veterans Day with a benediction prayer to help all veterans, as well as active duty and the “22 a day.”