Orange City—Glenn Hubenette always thought he had guardian angels watching over him.

As a member of the U.S. Army, the 85-year-old Orange City man had more near-death experiences in the Korean War than he would like to remember.

Hubenette, a decorated war veteran—he received a Combat Infantryman Badge, and a Purple Heart after five pieces of shrapnel blew into his back; three of them permanently stationed—now faces a different enemy: Pancreatic cancer.

He was diagnosed in November and referred to the Orange City Area Home Health & Hospice.

“I don’t have any pain or nothing yet, or symptoms, but they say I got it,” Hubenette said.

A fortunate circumstance in Hubenette’s otherwise unfortunate situation is Orange City Area Home Health & Hospice has the only Level 3 certified We Honor Veterans partner hospice service in N’West Iowa.

Level 4 is the highest ranking a hospice can attain and Orange City Area Home Health & Hospice has plans to reach it next.

We Honor Veterans was started in 2010 by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization to ensure America’s former service members are treated with the utmost dignity until the very end.

The only other partner hospice in the region is Sanford Home Health & Hospice Sheldon, which is at the “recruit” level.

Orange City Area Home Health & Hospice became involved with the We Honor Veterans program, Orange City Area Home Health & Hospice also had to offer a veteran-to-veteran volunteer program.

“That’s one part of the program we are super excited about,” Jungers said. “We train volunteers, who are veterans, to care for, meet with and serve veterans who are at the end of their life.”

Michelle Vaas, Hubenette’s social worker through Orange City Area Home Health & Hospice, is a proponent of getting other former service members involved in the hospice process.

“We found too, as social workers, you can’t always understand what they’re going through, but volunteers who’ve been through it can,” Vaas said.

‘Day I won’t forget’

Things Hubenette encountered while in the service would burden anyone.

One of his most vivid incidents occurred on Dec. 3, 1950, five days before his 19th birthday.

“It’s a day I won’t forget,” Hubenette said. “I have bad dreams every year around that time; we lost about 200 men.”

His squadron encountered soldiers for the People’s Republic of China while guarding an area near the Manchurian border.
scratched his front before he came to a stop on a road.

On the road, Hubenette and other fleeing troops spotted an American convoy which they joined to complete their escape.

“It was a scary time,” Hubenette said. Other “scary times” include when a machine gun burst barely missed the back of his head as wasretreating but only because he tripped, or when white phosphorus shells rained down all around his team while they were in cover; yet, not a single round resulted in a direct hit on them.

“I had a lot of instances like that; I believe in angels,” Hubenette said. “When we landed in Korea, I made peace with the Lord. I said, ‘Lord, if it’s Your will I come home so be it; if I don’t, please take me up to heaven with You.’”

In addition to threats presented in combat, he also dealt with the elements of the Korean terrain during a harsh winter – something that left him with permanent nerve damage in his lower limbs – malnutrition and a spastic colon disorder which was not addressed until after he left the service.

‘Similar things’

For the last decade, prior to Orange City Area Home Health & Hospice becoming involved with We Honor Veterans, Bob Boonstra of Orange City met with veterans on behalf of the veterans’ organization.

Boonstra, a U.S. Navy veteran who served during the Vietnam War, continues his role with Orange City Area Home Health & Hospice and has met with Hubenette regularly since December.

“Even though one veteran that is serving another one might not have had anywhere near the same horrible experiences that the person you are serving did; the fact that I went through the two years or four years — in my case it was four years — there a lot of similar things that take place emotionally, psychologically,” he said.

Boonstra said he and other veteran volunteers’ relatable experiences makes it easier for hospice vets to open up, and they can provide them a judgment-free outlet.

“My first meeting with Glenn, he was interested in hearing that I was a veteran,” Boonstra said. “He was interested in that and that helped a lot.”

“Bob, oh, I love him,” Hubenette said. “He’s a nice guy. He stops to see me all the time and we talk.”

In a way, Boonstra and Vaas have become Hubenette’s new guardian angels.

‘Very unique needs’

The duo, with input from Hubenette, arranged for a special pinning ceremony at Orange City home on Jan. 26, just as a way to thank him for service.

Although the pinning ceremony was more for show than formality, Orange City Area Home Health & Hospice still had programs prepared and held a light reception afterward.

The ceremony featured hymns and patriotic songs, Hubenette delivering a condensed chronological speech focusing on his time in the service, and capped off with Boonstra thanking him while presenting him a certificate and pinning an American flag on his shirt collar.

“Michelle Vaas, she’s a sweetheart; boy, she’s a nice gal,” Hubenette said. “We had the party in my living room — maybe 10 to 15 there. We had coffee and cookies, and she had somebody make these American flag cookies, and boy, were they good.”

Hubenette’s pinning ceremony was the first of its kind for Orange City Area Home Health & Hospice; and it will not be the last.

Jungers said 60-75 veterans go through hospice care with Orange City Area Home Health & Hospice annually, and she is aware they have to tailor each ceremony to an individual vet’s personality.

In Hubenette’s opinion, other veterans should take advantage of services provided through We Honor Veterans affiliated hospices, such as the veteran-to-veteran program.

Vaas takes pleasure in knowing Orange City Area Home Health & Hospice’s services have been able to help Hubenette and thinks they will be able to do the same for other vets.

“We are finding veterans nearing the end of their life have very unique needs,” Vaas said. “Even Glenn has said to us, ‘The images are getting more vivid.’ To pair them up with somebody that can understand that and talk them through that has been really helpful.”

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