

By Gretchen Wenner May 30, 2011 [Link](#)

Memorial Day services at Bakersfield's Union Cemetery Monday morning went off under perfect skies and ushered in the fulfillment of two men's longtime dreams.

Richard "Smitty" Smith, 78, for one, had been trying since 1984 -- when he moved to Bakersfield -- to get some improvements done at Kern County's oldest veteran's cemetery. Smith served in the Air Force during the Korean War and later joined the Army.

"What was lacking," Smith said, pointing to newly installed flag holders flanking a monument in the veteran's section, "was them flags."

Behind him stood six freshly planted flags for the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, Coast Guard and POWs/MIAs.

The project was undertaken by soon-to-be Eagle Scout Ryan Frapwell. The 17-year-old Centennial High School junior wrangled about six volunteers, including a family friend who works with concrete, to help him build a ceremonial walkway and strips for the flag holders. The six flags were also donated. He raised about \$700 for the project, with most of the funds paying for the concrete.

"I got it done last weekend," Frapwell said of the effort, which took about two months.

Smith and Frapwell received trophies for the project during the ceremony.

Not far from the new flags, another veteran's family members also celebrated a years-long effort: a headstone for their uncle, Johnny C. Brown. Brown, who died in 1985, served in the Army during World War II and also in the Korean War.

His nephew, Garry Brown, 51, had been trying since 1996 to get a headstone to mark his uncle's grave.

"They gave me the runaround," he said of his efforts through numerous agencies.

But not long ago, a veteran's advocate suggested Brown contact television station KGET Channel 17 and ask them to investigate. The station put Brown in touch with Rep. Kevin McCarthy's office, and the headstone became reality.

Brown and other family members, including siblings Tammy Brown and brother David Brown, were on hand for Monday's services.

"I couldn't be more elated," David Brown said.

An enthusiastic crowd of veterans and family members enjoyed the service. A crowd of black-vested American Legion Riders from Chapter 26 were on hand, including chapter president Boomer Montgomery, an Army private during the Vietnam War.

"It makes me think of all the ones that never came home," Montgomery said.

McCarthy spoke at the service. State Senator Michael Rubio also spoke. State Assemblywoman Shannon Grove, an Army veteran, attended, as did Kern County Supervisor Karen Goh.

The service at Union Cemetery honoring America's fallen warriors was one of several held locally over the weekend. A morning service Sunday at Bakersfield National Cemetery was pelted with hail, said McCarthy, who also spoke at that service. On Monday, events were held at Hillcrest Memorial Park and at both Greenlawn locations.

