

The Stars And Stripes Forever

Mack and Nancy Hilton

GIANT U.S. FLAG CREATED TO HONOR VETERANS PAST AND PRESENT

By Donna Farmer

MACK AND NANCY HILTON were on vacation on Independence Day in 2004, when they happened to see a TV newscast showing unidentified protesters stomping on an American flag. The sight sickened them — and inspired Nancy. Already an avid afghan maker for nursing home residents, Nancy decided she would crochet a giant American flag to honor the men and women who had fought and were fighting still under the banner of the Stars and Stripes. Just over a year earlier, the United States and its allies had invaded Iraq, the first phase in a bloody conflict that would continue to involve U.S. military personnel until our withdrawal in 2011.

Nancy could not know at that time the effort that would be involved in the creation of the flag. She did know she wanted to go big — 25 feet by 16 feet — in order to draw positive media attention to Old Glory. She began by acquiring a small flag from a gift shop in order to ascertain the correct dimensions. By the time Nancy was done, the flag included over 750,000 stitches, over 20 miles of yarn, and an untold number of hours of stitching. Amazingly, it is all one piece except for the stars which are stitched onto the blue back-ground for a raised effect. It was a daunting task undertaken out

of love of country and admiration for our soldiers past and present.

Veterans Day 2007 marked the flag's first public display. Soon Nancy's dream of positive media attention for the Stars and Stripes happened. Tyler television stations aired stories and area newspapers published articles about the one-of-a-kind flag. From there, one thing led to another. The flag's travel log includes being displayed with the Vietnam Veterans Traveling Wall in Palestine, during Armed Forces Weekend in Palestine, at a Tony Douglas Armed Forces Day Concert in Canton, at San Antonio's Brooke Army Medical Center, and at a Wounded Warrior Project fundraiser in Huntsville.

Nancy and her husband, Mack, who live in the eastern part of Henderson County, noticed as public knowledge about the flag grew, they began receiving more and more "gracious e-mails from military service men and women acknowledging that their message had been heard." Further, on occasions when the flag was on display, the Hiltons had the opportunity to distribute handmade patriotic lap afghans to veterans.



A Gen. Patton look-alike in front of Hilton's 25' x 16' hand-crocheted flag.

Nancy and “The Love Stitchers” group, which began as a ministry to hand-crochet lap afghans for nursing home patients, have seen their numbers wax and wane. Fewer and aging stitchers now crochet red, white and blue in a variety of styles for veterans. To date, they have given out more than 4,000 hand crocheted and knitted afghans to residents of nursing homes, hospice patients, shut-ins, veterans, wounded warriors and active military.

“We hope that when people see this flag or any American flag, people will remember what our military is doing for us right now, what they have done in the past, and what they will do in the future to keep the United States of America free and safe,” said Nancy. “We hope people will stop and say a prayer for all our military and veterans ... and show them the respect and gratitude they deserve.”

Today, the Hiltons ponder this unique and gigantic flag's future. Mack is in his late 70s with Nancy close behind, and they can no longer manage it. The flag is presently stored in Palestine, but Nancy did not labor over all those stitches so that her creation could be hidden away. It is a huge undertaking to load, transport, unload, set up the flag's second

“Every glory that we associate with [the flag] is the result of duty done.”
— President Ulysses S. Grant.

frame, take it all down and move it again. The couple is leaning toward putting it on eBay, hoping someone with deep pockets will purchase the flag and display it where it will continue to inspire love of country. Nancy points out that any money they might make from the flag's sale would be donated to a charity that embraces veterans and their needs.

They also plan on selling some of Nancy's other creations to benefit a charity. She has stitched the official emblems of the United States Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force and Coast Guard. The beautiful, framed Tunisian crocheted and hand-embroidered emblems are 5 feet by 5 feet with approximately 300 hours of labor in each. The Hiltons have displayed all five alongside the flag.

Thomas Jefferson was talking about people like Mack and Nancy Hilton when he said, “The cement of this union is the heart-blood of every American.”

