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Two inducted into Hall of Fame at annual WKU Veterans Day ceremony

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Western Kentucky University President Timothy Caboni and Military Sci a wreath in honor of American veterans during the WKU Veterans Day c Union in Bowling Green on Friday.

PHOTOS BY Grace Ramey/photo@bgdailynews.com

On Friday, Western Kentucky University honored two veterans and former WKU ROTC cadets who embodied the “gold standard of a life well-lived.”

WKU held a Hall of Fame induction for the pair, the late Col. William “Ed” Houston and Lt. Col. Doug Verdier, at its annual Veterans Day wreath-laying ceremony.

Five ROTC cadets made a presentation of the colors, holding American, Kentucky and WKU flags, before WKU President Timothy Caboni and Lt. Col. Tony Stuzik, professor of military science, presented the wreath, featuring red, white and blue flowers.

The ceremony was held in the Nite Room of Downing Student Union with a clear view of the campus’ Guthrie Bell Tower.

“May all who pass by that (Guthrie) Bell Tower, the center of our campus, and all those who hear its carillon be reminded of every individual who’s fought and continues to fight for our freedom for our nation,” Caboni said.

Retired Lt. Col. Stewart Wade accepted the Hall of Fame induction on behalf of Houston, a pioneer in the field of environmental toxicology in addition to his 25 years of active duty. Upon his 1960 WKU graduation, Houston joined the Army and took on positions including director and chief virologist at the 5th Army Medical Laboratory and chief of the bacteriology branch of microbiology within the Sixth Army Medical Laboratory.

After getting more biology schooling at Vanderbilt University, Houston conducted virology research at the U.S. Army Medical Research Institute of Infectious Diseases among other key scientific work.

While Wade never really knew Houston, their paths often paralleled. The pair attended the same high school and college, were in the same ROTC class and the Army, and even spent time in the same place in Germany at the same time, Wade said.

Wade said that he submitted Houston for nomination because he “wanted to do something good for a complete stranger.”

Houston’s children – Holly Bohman, Heather Borntraeger and Kelly Houston – attended the ceremony.

“He was our hero,” Borntraeger said. “And we definitely see how many people poured into his life so that he could lead with courage and integrity.”

Retired Major Mike Kenney accepted Verdier’s award in his absence. Kenney and Verdier were classmates and ROTC peers at WKU beginning in 1960.

“He was the type of guy that when you met him the first time, you knew he was focused,” Kenney said.

At WKU, Verdier was a critical member of the College Heights Herald, serving as editor-in-chief his senior year. Throughout his Army career, he was assigned to stints in

Germany, Panama, Vietnam, Fort Leavenworth in Kansas and Fort McClellan in Alabama.

Verdier earned two Bronze Stars for risking his life to lead his group against an enemy force during his first tour in Vietnam.

WKU MS4 ROTC Cadet Lauren Willett moderated the ceremony. She said that the presence of Caboni, the student body president and several members of the community was special.

“I’ve been to three colleges. I’ve never been on a campus that celebrates military students and veterans like WKU does,” Willett said. “It just means a lot to me knowing that – I’m not a veteran yet, I’m just a student – but knowing that I will have that support whenever I do end up serving.”

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