

# Celebrating a Century

## VFW Post in New Hampshire celebrates SS Leopoldville survivor's 100th birthday

Jul 16, 2021

For Paul Plotkin's 100th birthday, VFW Post 1617 in Derry, New Hampshire, honored its own WWII veteran with a special ceremony on June 26.

Plotkin, a Bridgeport, Connecticut, native residing at Birch Heights' retirement facility in Derry, was surprised at Post 1617 by an attendance of more than 30 people that included friends, family, Post members and government officials.

The WWII veteran was honored with gifts and pleasantries, which included a lifetime membership from Post 1617 and Derry's American Legion Post, as well as a birthday card from New Hampshire U.S. Sen. Maggie Hassan (D-NH).

Hassan, who visited Post 1617 to hand Plotkin the birthday card herself, praised the veteran for more than his longevity.

"As you celebrate your many years in New Hampshire, I hope that you reflect on the memories you have made with joy and are filled with pride for all that you have accomplished," Hassan said in her card. "I also want to thank you for your dedicated service to this country in World War II. We owe it to you, and to all who serve — or have ever served — to continue to work to make sure that our state and our nation are ever worthy of your sacrifice."

Serving with the Army's 66th Infantry Division during WWII, Plotkin was a crewmember aboard the ill-fated SS Leopoldville, a former passenger liner used to transport troops during the war in Europe.

Plotkin was aboard on Christmas Eve, 1944, when the Leopoldville left its pier in Southampton, England, with more than 2,000 American troops headed across the English Channel to Cherbourg, France.

Within five and a half miles of reaching its destination, the Leopoldville was then torpedoed

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and sunk by a German submarine.

Plotkin was among the few that survived the ambush, which claimed the lives of 763 American soldiers and left another 493 lost to the Channel's frigid waters.

He would eventually go on to fight in the Battle of the Bulge several days later.

It was in this unwavering commitment to his country that Hassan, whose father also fought in the Battle of the Bulge, added that Plotkin exemplified American values.

"What we are capable of doing, in devotion to freedom, makes us a country and a people," she said of Plotkin's service.

Like Hassan, many local veterans of both the American Legion and Post 1617 provided their own tribute to Plotkin, sharing similar thoughts on the WWII veteran.

This was compounded by congratulations from the office of New Hampshire U.S. Rep. Chris Pappas, as well as the Derry Town Council, which offered Plotkin a proclamation.

At the center of an overwhelming celebration, however, Plotkin accepted the abundance of tributes and congratulations with humility.

"It's hard for me to speak," Plotkin said. "I never expected anything like this, it's all been so great. From my heart, I truly thank you all."