

***No Wreaths Across America event in 2020, but wreaths still get placed*****SRT, Boy Scouts contribute to cause at Mill Springs National Cemetery****BY CHRISTOPHER HARRIS**

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Every year at the Mill Springs National Cemetery, Wreaths Across America remembers the nation's veterans who have passed on.

Like everything else in 2020, the looming specter of COVID-19 changed the way that played out this year.

"Usually, Wreaths Across America has a formal ceremony," said Doug Baker, chief of the Somerset-Pulaski County Special Response Team (SRT). "Due to COVID-19, they haven't been able to; the National Cemetery Association wouldn't allow them to have a public ceremony."

Instead, a combination of private interests and dedicated first responders gathered

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**SRT members Steve Woods, asst. chief; Doug Baker, chief; Zack Nicholson; and Ryan Hughes gather to place a wreath on the grave of Congressional Medal of Honor winner Sgt. Brent Woods, a Pulaski County Buffalo Soldier.**

CHRISTOPHER HARRIS | CJ

**WREATHS:** Nearly 175 wreaths total placed at Mill Springs National Cemetery

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at the cemetery for the military deceased on West Ky. 80 Friday afternoon to take it upon themselves to lay Christmas wreaths on various graves, in remembrance and reverence — and socially distanced.

Wreaths Across America were able to bring about 144 wreaths, which were placed by Boy Scouts from Troop 170 and other individuals who had bought wreaths for specific graves. Since it wasn't sure if the Wreaths Across America organization would even send any, SRT went ahead and got about 30 wreaths themselves, plus two large ones.

One of those went on the grave of Congressional Medal of Honor winner Sgt. Brent Woods, a Pulaski County Buffalo Soldier who, in August of 1881, saved the lives of many of his comrades after his unit was attacked by Apaches in a New Mexico canyon. Another was placed at the Confederate cemetery site around the corner from the Mill Springs National Cemetery, at the Mill

"It's teaching (the Scouts) respect for their country, for one; duty to God, duty to others," he added. "It teaches them loyalty to their country."

The non-profit Wreaths Across America started officially in 2007, but the wreath-laying Kentucky started a year before that, and it has been coming to Mill Springs National Cemetery for the last decade-and-a-half, noted organizer Michael Lodico, who was at the scene with boxes full of wreaths.

"We do as many as we can; we get gravespecific requests that we take care of as well; ... the extras, we just spread them out throughout the cemetery," said Lodico. "Unfortunately, we can't hold the full ceremony because of COVID, but we're adapting and doing as much as we can."

'It's small, but it means an awful lot to us to come and give a little bit of honor to the people who served so much.'

## Springs Battlefield.

Others were put on an assortment of different graves, including family members and former SRT member Troy Karriker.

"It means a lot to us," said Baker. "We were so heartbroken during Memorial Day when the flags weren't allowed to be put out here (at the cemetery). ... We felt like, for the veterans, we had to do something for them this year. It's small, but it means an awful lot to us to come and give a little bit of honor to the people who served so much."

Assistant Scoutmaster Kevin Pinson said they wanted the troop to help place wreaths as a community service project.

"We thought this would be a good outdoor event," he said, noting that social distancing concerns for COVID-19 might make other projects more difficult. "It's a very worthy cause. We wanted to be part of it."

## Doug Baker



**Asher Smith is joined by other members of Boy Scout Troop 170 in placing a wreath Friday at the Mill Springs National Cemetery.**

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