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DARRTOWN – Paul Gillespie thought an Army cannon would be the perfect addition to the community’s Veterans Memorial Park at the center of town, so he petitioned the Army in 2012 to obtain one. It arrived recently attached to a tank which now sits on a concrete slab in the park.

It was a long, agonizing process, but Gillespie had a big smile as the tank was being moved into position after a trip from Columbus.

The 57-ton M60A3 battle tank was released from the Army through its Army Donations Program.

“I asked for a 105 Howitzer, like Hanover has, but I got a call from Michigan saying they had no cannons but they had an M60 tank. I said, ‘How much space do I need?’ I came down here and measured. I asked how long and they said a couple months,” Gillespie said as the crowd gathered to watch a tank being unloaded from a truck. “We poured the pad and I had to send a picture. Nothing happened.”

The original application was good for three years and in 2015, it had to be renewed.

Gillespie, a current Milford Twp. trustee, had been exchanging phone calls and e-mails with the Army representative in Columbus. Approval and release were always imminent but delayed by “paperwork” until the person he had been dealing with retired and was replaced by a woman in that position.

The COVID-19 pandemic intervened and delayed the tank release even more, but Gillespie was assured it would be coming.

“We called back and forth. I saw a picture of the tank,” he said. He finally asked if he could see it and was told he could go to Columbus to see it. Gillespie and his wife, Marlene, drove up there.

She has a great memory of that visit.

“It was like buying a used car,” she said. “I asked if they had them in any other colors, but it went right over his head.”

Finally, the release was set and the tank was to make the trip to Darrtown. The Army was to deliver it at no charge on December 15 but it turned out they had nothing available big enough to haul it.

Greg Reffitt, of Reffitt’s Towing in McGonigle, had agreed to place the tank on its pad but with no delivery vehicle available, he arranged for the transport but that cost \$7,700, paid out of funds remaining from the 2014 Darrtown Bicentennial fund. The cost did not faze Gillespie.

“We had come too far not to get it,” he said.

It took a lot of maneuvering and blocking of Route 177 for a while, but the tank arrived December 14 and Reffitt’s crew got the tank off of the truck trailer, pulled across the road and moved into position on the pad just ahead of dark that day.

Reffitt met the challenge and added something new to his firm’s resume.

“I have moved a little of everything from a locomotive to a car, but I have never done a tank,” he said with a laugh. After it was over, he said, “It went fairly well. Forty-five years I’ve been doing this. I’ve seen some odd things. This is my first tank. The heaviest

thing we've ever lifted we put a locomotive back on the tracks. You'd be shocked at some of the things. When you get steel when a truck rolls over."

The seemingly over-matched winch they used was dug in and pulled the tank along with expert guidance to actually steer the tank to line it up with the concrete pad.

"At least we're on and nobody hurt. A lot of things we are on, people are hurt," Reffitt said.

As a side note, the winch vehicle they used costs \$100,000, he said.

Among the Darrtown crowd watching the process, was Dick Coombs, a former Milford Twp. trustee for 24 years, who served on a tank in World War II as his tank battalion traveled from France to Germany.

"We had five people inside. It was crowded," Coombs said. "This is a newer tank than we had."

Gillespie stood near the tank after it was in place on the concrete pad and said he was pleased all his effort over the years had paid off.

"We got 'er done. It looks good," he said, adding through the years of calls and e-mails he never doubted the tank would finally arrive. "They said they wanted to get rid of it."

He thought back on the years pursuing it and said with a laugh, "I wanted a 105 Howitzer and I got a tank with a 105 Howitzer attached to it."

According to the rules of the Donations Program, the tank is Darrtown's to keep as long as they want it but there is one annual requirement. He needs to take a picture of it every November to

send to the Army to assure it is being cared for and treated respectfully.

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CAPTIONS THAT ACCOMPANIED PHOTOS IN ARTICLE:

Paul Gillespie stands in front of the M60A3 battle tank after it was placed in the Darrtown park. It became a labor of love of his to have the tank placed there after originally requesting a cannon for the site and encountering years of paperwork delays.

CONTRIBUTED/BOB RATTERMAN

The small CAT winch would seem to be overmatched for the job, but it pulled the 57-ton tank across the road in into the park onto the concrete pad prepared for it.

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The tank was installed in the Darrtown park in the center of town after being pulled across Route 177 with traffic stopped for the project. It was a lot of work and maneuvering to get the tank in place in the park in Darrtown but it was mission accomplished after it came to rest on its concrete pad.

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