

MARTINSVILLE BULLETIN

Service honors veterans

Tuesday, May 29, 2001

Dark skies set the somber tone for the 17th annual Memorial Day Service held Monday at Carver Memorial Gardens.

More than 100 people, many of them armed forces veterans, gathered under tents to mourn the costs of war while recognizing the achievements of those still alive. An empty chair placed in the midst of the assembly denoted those absent from the ceremony - prisoners of war and those missing in action.

"The part of the world now known as the United States was built by brave men and women ... all with the desire for freedom," said retired Lt. Col. Walter E. Arnold. Arnold was the keynote speaker at the event and his remarks closely followed this year's theme: The Desire For Freedom.

Despite opposition from both outside and inside the nation, Arnold said that the call for freedom was so strong that many pursued it, although they knew that lives would be lost, property damaged and lives drastically changed. Soldiers answering the call, he said, endured separation from family, hardships and danger.

"The call still exists today. The desire for freedom is alive and well today," he said, adding that Monday was a time to reflect on what has been done and plan for the future.

"The desire for freedom is evident in the First Amendment. The decision has been made. The course has been established. It is of utmost importance that we continue to honor those who gave their lives," Arnold said.

A Bassett resident, Arnold was on active duty with the 163rd Military Intelligence Battalion in Fort Hood Texas. He is on reserve duty with Detachment H, 2174th U.S. Army Reserve Garrison, Martinsville.

The laying of a memorial wreath and a firing squad salute were conducted by members of the Laurel Park High School JROTC Color Guard. The Fieldale-Collinsville High School Band performed during the ceremony and an acappella trio, including Johnny and LaTara Philpott and DeAnna Moyer, sang the National Anthem. Among those to pay their respects to deceased veterans Monday were Henry County Sheriff H. Frank Cassell; Henry County deputy sheriff, Lt. Joe Louis Hairston; Paula Burnette, Iriswood supervisor; Bruce Dallas, city council member; delegate, Ward Armstrong and Roscoe Reynolds.

The service was sponsored by Carver Memorial Gardens and local citizens. Across the state, rain clouds did not keep people away from the state's cemeteries Monday, as the nation honored the men and women who have protected America's freedom.

"It was our largest turnout ever, despite the bad weather," said David Ruth, assistant superintendent of Richmond National Battlefield Park.

Richmond National Battlefield Park held its 10th Memorial Day Service at the national cemetery at Fort Harrison in Varina. Ruth said the event included a speaker, the playing of Taps, and a wreath-laying ceremony over the grave of Fort Harrison's Congressional Medal of Honor winner.

Pvt. George A. Buchanan, of the 148th New York Infantry, won the medal in September 1864 for leading a charge on Confederate artillery at Chapins Farm - which is adjacent to the Fort Harrison Cemetery - and driving the cannoneers from the guns. He was mortally wounded in the attack.

Ruth said Monday's ceremony was not just about the Civil War, however. "This is an occasion where we feel very strongly about our opportunity to pay tribute to all veterans, not just Civil War," he said.

In Hampton Roads, Admiral Clinton E. Adams remembered the victims of last October's bombing attack on the USS Cole during a speech at Portsmouth Naval Medical Center.

"The admiral mentioned in his address ... the personal feelings of loss that he has of the 17 sailors who were killed in the bombing," Lt. j.g. Robert Lyon said.

The bombing affected hospital staff especially, Lyon said, because many of the wounded were treated there.

Adams also asked the 250 or so present to take time to honor the soldiers and sailors guarding America today, Lyon said.

The event also included a wreath-laying ceremony.

The timing of the ceremony proved fortuitous. Not a drop of rain fell until everything was finished and they were folding up the seats, Lyon said.