

MARTINSVILLE BULLETIN

Security takes sacrifice, speaker says

Memorial Day service at Carver Memorial Gardens



Master of ceremonies Elder Alan Preston opens the 26th annual Memorial Day program at Carver Memorial Gardens.

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By MICKEY POWELL - Bulletin Staff Writer

National security is not achieved without sacrifice, according to retired Air Force Chief Master Sgt. Cecil T. Smith.

That includes soldiers losing their lives. Hundreds of thousands of American soldiers have died in combat since the United States achieved independence from Great Britain in the 1700s, Smith said during the 26th annual Memorial Day service held Monday night at Carver Memorial Gardens.

Each of those soldiers was someone's father, mother, son or daughter, said the former Henry County resident. As such, "each was the most important person in someone's life," Smith said, and "each left a void that cannot be filled."

Memorial Day is observed to remember them, as well as the sacrifices made by all military veterans, he said. Human sacrifice resulted in the freedom that Americans enjoy today, and "it will be human sacrifice that sustains it," said Smith.

He defined freedom as "the power to exercise choice ... without constraints" and sacrifice as "the forfeiture of something of great value" for something of greater value. Freedom and sacrifice go hand in hand, he said.

Smith voiced concern that many people seem to have become nonchalant about Memorial Day, especially since Congress in 1971 designated the last Monday in May as the holiday. Americans may regard the day as being part of a three-day weekend more than they remember why it is observed, he indicated.

"Today we rededicate ourselves" to remembering fallen soldiers and promoting the freedom they died to protect, said Smith. "History has taught us over and over again that freedom is not free," he said.

Smith, of Yorktown, is a native of Axton and graduate of the former George Washington Carver High School. He entered the Air Force in 1970 and spent his 30-year military career involved with electrical systems. When he retired, he was electrical systems manager at Langley Air Force Base.

Today, he works for the federal government, managing a 22-person element that maintains

Langley's emergency power support system.

He expressed confidence in today's soldiers, saying "they make me proud to be an American and a veteran."

Also speaking during the Memorial Day service was 5th District U.S. Rep. Tom Perriello, D-Albemarle County. He mentioned that last week the U.S. military saw its 1,000th death as part of the fighting in Afghanistan. He said that person, 24-year-old Marine Cpl. Jacob C. Leicht of Texas, ironically was born on July 4 — Independence Day.

"All of those who serve in uniform" provide valuable service to the nation, Perriello said. "We must make sure every day is Memorial Day" to recognize that service, he said. During the service, students in Magna Vista High School's JROTC Color Guard took responsibility for the laying of the wreath and lowering of the flag. The Bassett High School Band performed patriotic music.

Smith encouraged the students to "be the face of hope and prosperity" in the future. He received a plaque in recognition of his speech. Also, John R. Redd was honored for 26 years of service to American Legion Homer Dillard Post 78.

A total of 127 military veterans from Henry County and Martinsville died during the 12 months preceding May 24. Their names were printed in the service's itinerary, and they were remembered in silence.



Speaker CMS Cecil T. Smith addresses the crowd Monday at Carver Memorial Gardens