

MARTINSVILLE BULLETIN

Memorial service reminds audience of price of peace

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By MICKEY POWELL - Bulletin Staff Writer

Soldiers who lost their lives during combat made the ultimate sacrifice to ensure that Americans would continue living in freedom, area veterans and their families were reminded Sunday.

"They wanted to make a difference in our world. They did just that," said Robert N. "Bob" Rangeley, a former FBI agent and Army Air Forces officer.

"I salute those who made the ultimate sacrifice, who are now in the world of peace and happiness," said Rangeley, keynote speaker during the 54th annual Memorial Day Ceremony at Roselawn Burial Park. He then asked for 15 seconds of silence to remember fallen veterans.

Rangeley, who retired in 1976 as a senior resident agent in the Danville office of the FBI, served in the Army Air Forces from 1943 until 1947.

He said the latter half of the 20th century will be remembered as a period of history marked by numerous military skirmishes worldwide, including the Korean conflict, the Vietnam War and the Persian Gulf War.

"We should hope and pray that, in the 21st century, our nation will enter a time that is more peaceful," he said, a time when soldiers do not have to lose their lives.

Several hundred people -- many of them armed forces veterans -- gathered under the trees at Roselawn to recognize the accomplishments of veterans still alive and salute those who died in the line of duty.

"Some who paid the ultimate sacrifice are buried on these grounds," said Phil Sparks, the cemetery's manager.

"For them, never let us forget, freedom is never free," said master of ceremonies Thomas Marshall.

A flag was raised to half-staff by the Bassett High School JROTC in memory of deceased veterans. The unit gave a firing squad salute, followed by the firing of 105 mm howitzers by the Virginia National Guard.

Erin Martin and Elizabeth Hooper, two members of the Martinsville and Henry County Honor Guard, played Taps on bugles.

During the ceremony, the name of the late Oscar "Ed" Braswell was added to a memorial plaque at the cemetery which denotes distinctive service provided by area veterans.

Braswell, a Danville native who later lived in Axton, served in Vietnam. After leaving the military, he became active in the Disabled American Veterans and the honor guard. Fellow veterans remembered him as someone who would go above and beyond the call of duty to help others in need.

His sister, Vanna Terry, accepted a commemorative plaque for her deceased brother. The laying of a memorial wreath was conducted by Michael Booker and Charles Stephenson. An unveiling of the flag and presentation of the Honor Roll Plaque was made by Roy Hopkins.

Don Pruett sang "America the Beautiful" and "My Country 'Tis of Thee." The Rev. James Alsop offered a memorial prayer; other prayers were led by the Rev. Ray Matthews.

Among those who paid their respects to deceased veterans Sunday were Martinsville Police Chief Mike Rogers, Sheriff Steve Draper and Mayor Mark Crabtree, Henry County Sheriff H. Frank Cassell and Supervisors Jamie Crigger and Paula Burnette, and 5th District U.S. Rep. Virgil Goode.

The annual Memorial Day service is sponsored by the cemetery, the Collinsville Jaycees, the Rangeley Ruritan Club and the Edward W. Richardson Detachment of the Marine Corps League, as well as area American Legion, AMVETS and Veterans of Foreign Wars posts and Disabled American Veterans Chapter 52.