

MARTINSVILLE BULLETIN

Ceremony dedicated to Marine

Monday, May 30, 2005

While the last Monday in May is officially recognized as Memorial Day, Americans should take the time every day to remember the sacrifices of the nation's veterans.

"Freedom is not free. Freedom costs, and it costs dearly," said Michael Harris, commander of the Department of Virginia American Legion. He spoke Sunday at the 58th Memorial Day Ceremony held at Roselawn Chapel Funeral Home and Burial Park in Martinsville.

"And it's because of our military and our fallen heroes that democracy still lives in this great country," Harris continued. "... So I ask each and every one of you to dedicate yourself to remembering this every day of your life. And when you see a veteran, please thank them for what they have done in providing freedom for you and your family."

Sunday's ceremony was dedicated to the memory of Marine Lance Cpl. Demarkus Demone Brown, a 2000 graduate of the former Laurel Park High School who was killed in November while serving in Iraq.

Brown's mother and stepfather, Chynita and Edward Belcher, received a plaque signifying the ceremony's dedication to their son.

In reading excerpts from two letters, Harris recounted the thoughts that go through the minds of young troops such as Brown who serve in combat, and how the ideals they treasure are universal and therefore cross generational lines.

From an Army captain who was killed east of Baghdad, writing home: "I see more courage in a day than I could have ever imagined before this. You inspire me to keep on going out here. You've made it so much easier for me to see the big picture as I go through life. That service to God and others is what matters. Family, God, duty and honor," Harris read.

From an Army private who was killed serving in Vietnam five days after writing his letter: "Remember when we were kids on Easter ... off to church we would go. And afterwards come home to look for our Easter baskets. What good times. I hope that God will bring me back home so that I may marry the girl I love, which will be in March, if everything goes OK. Then I too can watch my kids get all dressed up, head to church, and live that day all over again," Harris read.

To honor men such as these, Harris reminded the crowd that Americans should cherish the things they loved -- family, God and country -- and reflect the ideals and values our soldiers stood for and died for defending.

Harris is a Vietnam War veteran who served with the Air Force as an F3 combat pilot. Today he continues to serve, as a mission pilot for the Civil Air Patrol.

He is a member of American Legion Post 42 in Martinsville, and retired from the Virginia State Police with the rank of lieutenant.

Harris is a native of Staunton who now lives in Waynesboro with his wife, the former Lucy Lemons, daughter of Walter and Evelyn Lemons of Henry County.