

MARTINSVILLE BULLETIN

Local vets, Marines honored

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By AMANDA BUCK - Bulletin Staff Writer

Socrates once said that a man lives as long as he is remembered. If that is so, local fallen Marines Demarkus Brown and Jonathan Bowling clearly lived on in the hearts of their community this Memorial Day.

More than 100 officials, veterans and members of the public gathered Monday to dedicate the 21st annual Memorial Day service at Carver Memorial Gardens to the two deceased servicemen.

Lance Cpl. Demarkus Demone Brown, a 2000 graduate of Laurel Park High School, was killed in action in November while serving in Iraq. Cpl. Jonathan Williams Bowling, an officer with the Martinsville Police Department who lived in Patrick County, died in January, also while serving in Iraq.

Retired Marine Sgt. Maj. Michael K. Payne, an Axton native, compared both men to the Biblical David, who slayed a giant much more powerful than he.

"David stepped forward to represent the land and the people he loved," Payne told a crowd assembled for the 7 p.m. service. Like David, "both of these men stepped out on faith. They made the ultimate sacrifice in defense of this nation and its ideals."

Quoting the late former President Ronald Reagan, Payne said, "Some people spend an entire lifetime wondering if they made a difference. These Marines don't have that problem."

In addition to Brown and Bowling, Payne dedicated his remarks to all area men and women who served their country by joining the military.

"Martinsville and the surrounding counties are teeming with veterans of every major campaign," Payne said, citing major conflicts from World War I through Iraq. He urged listeners to remember veterans not just on Memorial Day, but throughout the year. "Don't wait for a beautiful and prestigious moment like today to say thank you," Payne said. "Thank them on the streets, in your homes, on the job and in the veterans' homes."

An Axton native, Payne enlisted in the Marine Corps in 1974 and completed a tour of combat duty in Saudi Arabia during Desert Storm. In 1997, he retired with 23 years of

service.

A postgraduate training/control officer with Hargrave Military Academy in Chatham, Payne is a member of Saint Paul High Street Baptist Church in Martinsville. He called speaking at Monday's service "one of the greatest honors I've had in my lifetime." Payne said he knew Brown and Bowling and was honored to be associated with them both.

"They're truly heroes in my book," he said.

Henry County School Board Chairman Curtis Millner served as master of ceremonies for the service. Prior to Payne's remarks, prisoners of war and soldiers missing in action were honored.

Youth members of Mt. Olive East Christian Church led the audience in the pledge of allegiance, and the Fieldale-Collinsville Middle School Band performed several pieces. Georgia Ramey sang the National Anthem, and Paul Shively, a captain with the Virginia Defense Force, introduced the speaker.

Following Payne's remarks, members of the Martinsville-Henry County Honor Guard were recognized, and Program Coordinator Constance M. Martin presented plaques to Payne and to the families of Brown and Bowling.

Chynita Belcher, Brown's mother, said after the service that she appreciated seeing so many people remember her son, who is buried in the cemetery.

"I think it's wonderful," she said. Belcher said she appreciated the opportunity "just to have (Brown's) memory honored, and to honor all the fallen soldiers."

She said she also enjoyed meeting Bowling's mother, Robin Feron. The two have corresponded but had not met, Belcher said.

Margie Dunford of Ridgeway, who serves as coordinator of the honor guard, said she, too, enjoyed the opportunity to honor local veterans.

"That's the least we can do for them, to be here," she said. "They were here for us."