

MARTINSVILLE BULLETIN

Memorial Day Observed

Ex-POW: Never forget sacrifice

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By KATHRIN KLENSHTEYN - Bulletin Staff Writer

Robert O. Gray knows what freedom means.

Gray's father used to tell him that people do not appreciate a well until it's dry. He said he never really understood that until the day he was captured by communists in Korea.

That day, he said, "the well of freedom went dry. Gray, of Roanoke, was held as a prisoner of war (POW) in the Korean war for 34 months. He spoke about that experience Sunday to the more than 100 people attending the Roselawn Chapel Funeral Home's 59th annual Memorial Day service. He said a prisoner of war comes as close to death as possible, without actually dying. And when a prisoner is liberated, it is like a resurrection. Only then, he said, can someone truly understand the sacrifice of soldiers who have died to protect their country. "We should never forget what they have done, he said. Gray said "most of us don't even know what freedom is because it is so "handy and commonplace.

But, he said, "freedom is not free. It is very expensive. Not only does it cost many dollars and cents, he said, but it costs blood and lives. He said Americans should be silent and think about things done by our heroes.

"They gave all they have — they can't give any more than that, he said. "They deserve all the recognition we can give them.

"You can ask no more of a person than that they lay down their lives for a friend or comrade, said Gray. "They gave it to you and me. I can never repay (it).

Gray is national director of the American Ex-Prisoners of War Foundation, chairman of the Prisoner of War Advisory Committee at the Veterans Administration Medical Center in Salem and an accredited national service officer for the American Ex-Prisoners of War. He also has been appointed by the governor of Virginia to the Governor's Advisory Group on Veteran's Affairs.

Gray spoke at the dedication of the POW Flagpole at the Virginia War Memorial and also gave the welcoming address in Washington, D.C. during the anniversary observance of the



Master of ceremonies Paul Shively shakes hands with Darrell Bowling and Robin Feron, parents of Marine Cpl. Jonathan Bowling, who was killed in Iraq on Jan. 26, 2005. Sunday's Memorial Service was dedicated in honor of Bowling.

signing of the armistice ending the Korean War.

Also at Sunday's program, S.T. Fulcher Jr. gave opening remark and the colors were presented by Bassett High School's JROTC. Peggy Santuk of AMVETS led the crowd in a tribute to prisoners of war and those missing in action.

A small table recognizing those missing was set in front of the podium. Objects on it, such as the white tablecloth and single red rose, were symbolic of the purity of the soldiers' intentions and their undying love and faith. Such a table is set out for every tribute to POWs and MIAs.

The day was dedicated to Marine Corps Cpl. Jonathan Bowling, formerly of Patrick County, who was killed in Iraq on Jan. 26, 2005, and plaques were given to his parents, Darrell Bowling and Robin Feron.

Among those attending Sunday's program were State Sen. W. Roscoe Reynolds, D-Ridgeway; Del. Ward Armstrong, D-Collinsville; Martinsville City Council member-elect Kathy Lawson; Martinsville Police Chief Mike Rogers and Sheriff Steve Draper and Henry County Sheriff's Lt. James Keaton.