

MARTINSVILLE BULLETIN

Connect troops' sacrifices to your freedom, speaker says

Memorial Day service at Roselawn Burial Park



Above, guest speaker Maj. Jeffrey S. Williams addresses a large crowd Sunday at the 63rd annual Memorial Day service at Roselawn Burial Park in Martinsville. During his speech, Williams described three servicemen who died for their country. One of them was Cpl. Jonathan Bowling of Patrick County, who was killed in Iraq in 2005.

Monday, May 31, 2010

By BULLETIN STAFF REPORTS -

It is easy to think in general terms about remembering American troops on Memorial Day. Tying their individual sacrifices to our own lives is more difficult, but it is what the holiday is all about, a speaker said Sunday.

"We can learn all about those that died. And we should," Maj. Jeffrey S. Williams said during the 63rd annual Memorial Day service at Roselawn Burial Park. "But we need to remember them. If we cannot translate their sacrifice into a manifestation of our freedom and way of life, then their sacrifice was made in vain."

Williams, who works for the Defense Prisoner of War/Missing Personnel Office at the Pentagon, told the crowd that Memorial Day is about more than picnics and "maybe remember(ing) that some American somewhere far away died while fighting for our country." Instead, "Memorial Day is a time for us to appreciate the ultimate sacrifice of so many Americans that gave up their lives so that we could live ours," Williams said.

To do that, he shared the stories of three servicemen, two of them from this area, who died in combat.

The first was John Donald Mumford, who fought in World War II. Williams said he "first met" Mumford by reading his "Individual Deceased Personnel File" in 2007.

Born in 1921 in St. Petersburg, Fla., Mumford was 21 when he joined the Army Air Corps for pilot training. On June 6, 1944, Mumford was part of a group that flew to bomb an airfield near Galatz, Romania, Williams said.

"About the time the Bedford Boys were going through hell on the beaches at Normandy, France, John Mumford and 1,081 other Americans experienced their own version of hell around two miles up in the air and 130 degrees below zero when they were attacked by German fighters in the skies over Romania."

Mumford and one of his squadron mates were lost, Williams said. Germans reported him killed, but his remains have never been found.

"Those of us that research World War II MIA and POW cases in the Office of the Secretary of Defense are hopeful that we'll find John Mumford within the next year," Williams said. "We will exhaust all possibilities as we go to Ukraine to find him and bring him home with honor."

The second man Williams talked about was an ancestor of his wife, Kathryn, named John Henry Osborne. He left his home in Bassett to fight in the Korean War in the Army's 45th Infantry Division.

He was killed June 21, 1952, while "fighting a communist attack," Williams said. When U.S. forces reclaimed the terrain where Osborne was killed a few days later, his body was returned to Bassett, where he was buried, Williams said. He was posthumously awarded the Bronze

Star Medal with "V" (for valor) device and the Purple Heart, Williams said.

The last man Williams described was Marine Cpl. Jonathan Williams Bowling of Patrick County, a Martinsville police officer who was killed in Iraq on Jan. 26, 2005. Williams said he taught Bowling in a French class at Patrick County High School in 1997, and described him as bright, handsome and trustworthy.

Like Mumford and Osborne, Bowling sacrificed his life fighting for his country, Williams said.

"Our way of life ... is only possible through the sacrifices of our warriors that have served so selflessly. ... Most of us are inclined to mourn the loss of such great Americans, and that's OK. But we need to also celebrate their lives, and we need to celebrate their sacrifice. We aren't celebrating that they died; we are honoring and celebrating the life they led and the victory they achieved for us through their ultimate sacrifice."

Williams recognized Bowling's father, retired Virginia State Police officer Darrell Bowling, who attended the service.

The service was dedicated to the Rev. Theo B. Marsh, who died in September. A veteran of World War II, he traveled to France in 2004 and received the American Society of the French Legion of Honor for his service.

Marsh's son, Timothy Marsh, received a plaque in honor of his father from Sonny Richardson, commander of American Legion Homer Dillard Post 78.

The Magna Vista High School JROTC presented colors and led the Pledge of Allegiance, and the Rev. Ron Peal led a memorial prayer. The AMVETS led a tribute to prisoners of war and those who are missing in action.

The Rev. Jeff Evans led the benediction.



Photo on Left-Cpl. Jonathan Bowling's father, Darrell Bowling, covers his heart as the flag is lowered to half staff for the memorial service. Framing him are Williams (left) and Paul Shively.

Photo on right-Maj. Jeffrey S. Williams speaks at Roselawn