

MARTINSVILLE BULLETIN

Veterans Day speakers honor those who serve now, in past

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By LES TRACEY - Bulletin Staff Writer

As soldiers continue to sacrifice in today's hot spots --Iraq and Afghanistan --Veterans Day offers people a time to stop and remember those who have helped shape the country, said Col. Dennis Via on Saturday.

"All veterans, regardless of the era in which they served have paid a price," said Via, a Martinsville native who is stationed in Washington, D.C. "They are our heroes, because they have triumphed over adversity."

The American Legion Homer Dillard Post No. 78 hosted a banquet honoring veterans at the Smith River Missionary Baptist Association Center in conjunction with Veterans Day, which is Tuesday.

Via said people may be more aware of recognizing and thanking veterans this year, as they are reminded almost daily of the dangers servicemen and women undertake when they volunteer.

"I think Americans are very proud of what our servicemen and women are doing right now," he said. "It (the situation in Iraq) makes us all reflect even more on the importance of recognizing veterans."

Via graduated from Carver High School in 1976 and serves with the office of the Director of Information Systems for Command, Control, Communications and Computers in the Department of the Army.

The office oversees the infrastructure of telecommunications and information systems in the Department of Defense.

He said he became interested in military service while attending Virginia State University. First, he joined the ROTC. Then he enlisted after graduation.

Though he now is a colonel and has been nominated for appointment as a general, he said it is humbling to return home and address the veterans who served before him. "Having served in the military now for 23 years, there's not many things that intimidate you," he said. "But coming home to speak to people who you've known all your life -- that is a little intimidating."

Earlier Saturday, a Veterans Day ceremony was held at Martinsville High School,

featuring Chief Warrant Officer Three Curtis Millner Sr., U.S. Army retired, who also represents the Iriswood District on the Henry County School Board.

"We are commemorating the service of veterans of all wars and conflicts," Millner said. "We remember how men and women set aside their civilian pursuits to serve their nation's cause, defend the freedom of mankind and preserve our precious American heritage."

Millner is the chaplain and service officer for American Legion Post No. 78, which he said was started by black veterans who could not gain membership in other legion posts in 1939.

He called on people to think of the soldiers who are fighting in foreign countries and remember to thank them when they return.

"Let us not forget our brothers and sisters who are currently serving in hot spots such as Iraq, Afghanistan and the Philippines," he said. "We (veterans) know what they're going through. Most of us have been there in a different war at a different time. They need our prayers and support."

Via echoed these thoughts, saying veterans, above all, know that there is a price for the freedom people enjoy in America.

"We cannot take our past peace and prosperity for granted," he said. "Our soldiers know this. They know that freedom isn't free. Eternal vigilance is the price we must pay for peace. So let us thank them (veterans) not only on Veterans Day, but every day."