

No Glory

By Stephen J.J. McKenzie, U.S. Army

There is little or no glory... in War.
 Death, is glamour free and is never envied by the living,
 Who understand what they are fighting for.
 I see my brother beside me... and his resolve.
 His courage serves to guide me, as bullets rain on our
 parade.
 Tempered steel nerves pulled taunt as piano strings,
 Every fiber of muscle, drawn like a bow,...
 Sitting and waiting, to let fly the arrow.
 I wonder... shall I live or die, as seconds tick by...
 snail... slow.
 A burst, of Hell fire, and the Earth erupts in a fountain of
 blood and body parts,
 as that little voice shrieks - "Enough!"
 Stumble, as I choke,... moving forward, through the haze
 and smoke...
 toward the raw meat that once spoke... My once comrade
 his torso, torn and broke.
 How many others? The sons of many mothers... Must
 battle for their lives?
 Never to return, from a country destined to burn...
 back home to their children and wives?
 Sick to my stomach, and scarred to my soul, getting out,
 alive, my only goal...
 Fighting fire with fire while fighting for control...
 Til silence and suffering and the ringing of my ears...
 Are the only sounds, that anyone hears...
 There is no glory in war... Only insanity.
 And for the sake of our Humanity... We must become
 something more... and
 Not... die trying.

Honor, Heal, Remember

Several hundred people, including over 120 riders of the Honor Ride Motorcycle Rally gathered at The Highground Veterans Park on Memorial Day. The focus of The Highground Memorial Day program was on remembering those who have died while serving and to bring awareness of the veteran suicide rate and how veterans and families can find help to deal with issues that arise after returning home.

At 11:30am, volunteers read the names of all the Wisconsin service men and women who were killed or missing in action during the Vietnam and Korean Wars. The Liberty Bell was rung at intervals during this reading. Several people stood silent on the plaza throughout the reading which took over an hour to complete.

The Loyal American Legion Post #175 presented the Color Guard and Rifle Squad to begin the ceremony. Marnie Schecklman of Greenwood led the audience in the "Star-Spangled Banner" and "God Bless America" during the ceremony. An invocation was provided by Pastor Al Houts.

Boy Scout Troops from Watertown and Neillsville (both are troops #43) and Sandi Frederickson of Marshfield helped The Highground present an emotional display of 22 pairs of military boots. These boots represented the average of 22 veterans that commit suicide in the U.S. each day.

Todd Stage, Persian Gulf combat veteran and counselor from the Wausau Vet Center, spoke on his experiences and how counseling can be an important first step in overcoming struggles with PTSD, trauma from service, and other difficulties in returning home to the "civilian" world. Todd is at The Highground each Thursday for free private and group counseling for veterans and families. Skip Sparks, Vietnam veteran from Abbotsford, related his experience of coping with PTSD and the effects of Agent Orange. His message was of the toll that this has taken on him and his family throughout the decades since coming home from the Vietnam War and is something he does not want to happen to more recent veterans. He told veterans to "find help NOW".

Major General Donald Dunbar was the keynote speaker of the Memorial Day program. He is the Adjutant General of Wisconsin. He also serves as Commanding General of the Wisconsin Army and Air National Guard responsible for both federal and state missions. He told of the great military history of Wisconsin and the cost that Wisconsin has paid in lives lost in service. Major General Dunbar had been to two ceremonies before arriving at The Highground on Monday; one in Loyal with the family of Staff Sgt. Todd Olson and one in Fairchild with the family of Spec. Charles Kaufman. Both Todd and Charles were killed while serving in Iraq.

The names of all Wisconsin service men and women who were killed in the Persian Gulf were read, followed by a rifle salute by the Loyal American Legion and "Taps" performed by bugler Kirkland Johnson of Greenwood. Major General Dunbar joined everyone present during a talking circle and the recognition of all veterans who were at the program.

Also at The Highground were two barrels, symbolic of Agent Orange barrels, that were created by Vietnam veteran Jim Walktendonk. These barrels will remain at The Highground through the end of June. Any Vietnam veteran affected by Agent Orange is invited to sign these barrels. Others may sign the barrel with the name of a Vietnam veteran that has passed who was affected with issues caused by Agent Orange exposure. The Highground thanks Hefko Floral, Hiller's True Value Hardware, Jim Osterman, Gross Motors, Judith Singer of "Being There - Reaching Out", Jenny Schmidt and the large number of volunteers that made the Memorial Day ceremony a day of Honoring, Healing and Remembering.

The Highground Veterans Park is located at W7031 Ridge Rd, Neillsville. For more information on The Highground or the counseling that is available, please call 715-743-4224.



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preacher@freeriderspress.us
P.O. Box 1126 Wautoma, WI 54982