

Convention Highlights

Sunday, July 20, 2014
Memorial Service

National Chaplain Stresses Obligation to Remember

VFW National Chaplain Robert H. Dickerson, an ordained Baptist minister, delivered the memorial address today. He noted that throughout our nation's history, veterans have sacrificed to protect their fellow citizens' cherished rights, such as the right to vote and worship freely. He cited examples of veterans serving in conflicts ranging from WWI to the Afghanistan War.

Dickerson, who served in Vietnam from 1971 to 1972, read a poem titled *I Was a Soldier*. "I was a soldier, that's the way it is, that's what we were, and are," he said. Serving first with Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 145th Aviation Battalion and later with the 1st Aviation Brigade, Dickerson said these four words are echoed in places like VA hospitals, Arlington National Cemetery and Gettysburg National Military Park. From the poem, he quoted, "These words are my pledge. If you must write them, put them on my stone. If you must speak them, speak them softly."

A member of Post 9186 in El Paso, the national chaplain concluded his sermon by reciting portions of a poem dear to VFW, *In Flander's Fields*, written by Canadian soldier-physician John McCrae, during WWI. The poem inspired VFW to adopt the Buddy Poppy as its official flower of remembrance to symbolize sacrifice on Memorial Day and other occasions.

Dickerson said McCrae was inspired to write the poem when the Canadian saw artillery shells exploding on the fresh, poppy-covered graves of WWI dead on the Belgian battlefield. The last verse of McCrae's poem aptly sums up Dickerson's theme: "If ye break faith with us who die, we shall not sleep, though poppies grow in Flander's Fields."

Ladies Auxiliary National President Armithea "Sissy" Borel and VFW Commander-in-Chief William Thien participated in the traditional symbolic tribute to departed comrades. The memorial ritual also included Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief John Stroud, Junior Vice Commander-in-Chief John Biedrzycki, Jr., past Commander-in-Chief John Hamilton and National Chaplain Dickerson.

Ladies Auxiliary National Soloist Julia Price performed moving renditions of "Sleep Soldier Boy" and "I Will Find You Again." The Central Baptist Church Choir from Eureka, Mo., performed "Freedom's Song" and "Then Sings My Soul." John Poitras of Post 2593 in Arnold, Mo., performed "Taps."

Chaplain Charles H. "Harry" Thomas, III, of Post 3944 in St. Louis delivered the invocation. VFW Department of Missouri Chaplain Deborah Halter of Post 6137 in St. Louis gave the benediction.

As is customary at VFW's Memorial Service, Gold Star Families were specially recognized.

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