

Convention Highlights

Sunday, July 14, 2016
Memorial Service

‘Giving What it Takes’ Theme of Memorial Tribute

Vietnam veteran Patrick Cleburne McClary, III, a life member of Post 3181 in Florence, S.C., delivered the memorial address today. He recalled his 19th reconnaissance mission on March 5, 1968, in Vietnam when he lost his left arm and left eye, while serving as a platoon leader with A Company, 1st Reconnaissance Battalion. On Hill 146 overlooking the communist-infested Quan Duc Valley, McClary and his men were attacked by the enemy using automatic weapons, satchel charges and hand grenades. Of the 13 men on patrol, two were killed and eight wounded. The motivational speaker, who underwent 41 operations and 2 ½ years in hospitals, noted that two of his men committed suicide after the war.

McClary, who gave up coaching college athletics to enlist in the Marines, paid special tribute to Pfc. Ralph H. Johnson. The 19-year-old Charleston, S.C., native threw himself on a grenade that landed inside a foxhole to save the lives of the Marines with him—one of them was McClary. Johnson was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor. On Sept. 5, 1991, the Charleston VA hospital was renamed the Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center. On April 2, 2016, a new guided-missile destroyer was christened the *USS Ralph Johnson* (DDG-114).

During his message, McClary quoted Romans 5:3-5, which says that personal suffering produces perseverance, character and hope. “In this world of give and take there are not enough people willing to give,” he concluded.

Past VFW national commanders-in-chief Robert E. Hansen (1961-62), John J. Stang (1974-75) and Dr. John Wasyluk (1977-78), all of whom died in the past year, were specifically remembered in the service.

VFW Auxiliary President Francisca Guilford and VFW Commander-in-Chief John A. Biedrzycki, Jr., participated in the traditional symbolic tribute to departed comrades. The memorial ritual also included Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief Brian Duffy, Junior Vice Commander-in-Chief Keith Harman, past Commander-in-Chief John W. Stroud, VFW National Chaplain Nick Guest and VFW Auxiliary Chaplain Sandi Kriebel.

Ladies Auxiliary National Soloist Carolyn Grusse performed moving renditions of “The Star-Spangled Banner” and “Sleep Soldier Boy.” The Charlotte Chorale sang “Song for the Unsung Hero,” “Mansions of the Lord” and “Ashokan Farewell.”

National Chaplain Guest delivered the invocation and VFW Department of Pennsylvania Chaplain Peter Hook gave the benediction.

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

-The End-