

Dedication from page 17A

There was no way for war veterans — and others — to remain stoic in the face of so many invocations of deceased warriors and bygone glories.

Decorated heroes like Medal of Honor winner Robert Simanek of Farmington Hills and former Vietnam prisoner of war Donald "Digger" Odell were among the honored guests. So was Dirk Vlug of Grand Rapids, another Medal of Honor winner, and Hazel Moyer, mother of deceased Medal of Honor winner Donald Moyer.

The principal dedication speech came from former astronaut Jack Louma, a retired Marine Corps colonel. O'Dell and Simanek also spoke.

They all stood at the podium haltingly reciting the value of such memorials. There were moments of unplanned silence as the speakers tried to regroup following tugs of emotion.

"There is no gift so great as the gift of life, and no sacrifice so noble as to relinquish that gift so another might live," Louma said. "Yet this was the risk our comrades in arms accepted as a fact of life."

Such heroes, he said, sometimes "were vilified by those who failed to realize that military people do not start wars; they fight them. That those who carry the rifles wish more for peace than do

'Wouldn't it be nice if none of our children had to endure any of that?'

Robert Simanek
Farmington Hills

their critics."

O'Dell, too, cited the need for peace, but said, "This is the land of the free only because it's been the home of the brave."

He quoted the comment from a Marine scribbled on a c-ration box at Khe Sanh: "For those who fought for it, life has a special flavor that those who didn't fight for it will never know."

O'Dell enlisted in the Air Force in 1955 and became a pilot. In August of 1967 he was shot down over North Vietnam while on a bombing mission. He was captured and suffered extensive abuse during interrogation. During his 18th consecutive day of being questioned, a guard broke his neck.

O'Dell stayed in the "Hanoi Hilton" prison for 5 1/2 years before being released to the U.S. Among his decorations are two Bronze Stars, a Legion of Merit, Distinguished Flying Cross and a Silver Star.

Simanek spoke of war's horrors and said, "Wouldn't it be nice if none of our children had to endure any of that?"

He jumped on a grenade to save some buddies during the Korean War. Somehow he survived. It took him five months to recover. Now he is one of just five surviving Michigan Medal of Honor winners and the only one from southeast Michigan.

Guests at the ceremony included representatives of the various armed forces and Jo Ann Snyder, widow of the memorial's artist. Karen Newman sang the National Anthem early in the ceremony and God Bless America near the end just before three Vietnam-era helicopters piloted by Michigan Army National Guard members flew over.

O'Dell called it "a great day for Oakland County."

Meanwhile, among the spectators sat Gilbert J. Dysarczyk of Waterford, state commander of the Polish Legion of American Veterans who was drafted into the Marines in 1969 soon after graduating from Birmingham Brother Rice High School.

Dysarczyk remembers with bitterness anti-war demonstrations during his time in the service.

"Back then they looked at you like you're the baby killers," he said. "I guess we've come a long way. Back then they didn't really know what was happening."

Beside him sat Faustlin Dobeki of Pontiac, an infantry veteran of World War II and past commander of the Pontiac AMVETS post.

"The country isn't as patriotic as it should be," he said, "but a veteran feels it more on Memorial Day."

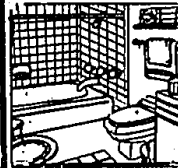
Perhaps the day's feelings were best summarized by Vietnam veteran David "Doc" Maloney during the invocation: "People die, not memories. . . We are forever joined through memories and emotions. It matters not when they served, where they served — only that they served."

Birmingham and Southfield also had Memorial Day services over the weekend and 17 of the county's cities staged parades, including Auburn Hills, Beverly Hills and Farmington.

Memorial Day began in 1868 as Decoration Day, which was an occasion in which people placed flowers on the graves of Union soldiers killed in the Civil War.

Reporter Larry Paladino and photographer John Stormzand are veterans of the Vietnam War. Both saw combat in the Army's 173rd Airborne Brigade.

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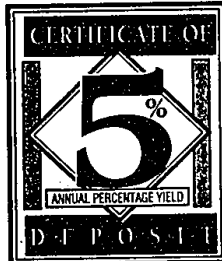
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