

# **15th Annual Memorial Day Sunset Ceremony Held To Honor Heroes, Loved Ones With Small Group Because Of COVID-19**

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ALTON - Alton's National Cemetery served as a poignant landscape and setting for Memorial Day participants gathered to honor heroes and loved ones. What should have been a well-attended 15<sup>th</sup> Annual Memorial Day Sunset Ceremony at 6:30 p.m., transitioned into an 8 a.m. shortened version; limiting the number of speakers, musicians, and honored guests.

Ame Callahan, Executive Director {SES} of NCA {National Cemetery Administration} Field Programs represented the federal government. Richard Baird, Vietnam Veteran, ceremony creator, facilitator, and coordinator delivered brief comments. Elijah Baird, Richard's grandson, led the Pledge of Allegiance, while VFW Post 1308 provided a prayer as well as firing a volley salute and playing "Taps."

Callahan welcomed those in attendance, stating that the NCA felt Covid-19 restrictions were necessary to protect the public from potential exposures to the virus. She added that every day is a "Memorial Day" for the NCA. Callahan and Baird set the wreath in place in front of the graves marked with stone crosses.

Baird shared some remarks as to the meaning of Memorial Day as he is asked each year at the ceremonies. "Preparation for next year's ceremony begins today. Already, I have

placed flags at the grave site of Dick Crawford, a close friend; at my father's grave who served at the end of World War II, at my grandma Dupy's grave in honor of her son, my Uncle Leon, who fought in Korea and had a portion of his head blown off as he was caught in a machine gun crossfire. Later on, within a year he died."

Continuing, Baird said, "Memorial Day reminds us of the freedoms exercised, separate from rights. It is a feeling forever perpetuated in one's spirit and soul."

"Local news sources highlight groups of people frolicking on beaches and in the water. People gathering to share a bar-b-cue. I offer no condemnation of their choices as adults, rather, I realize it is critical for me to educate and share my beliefs as seen in my actions and words."

Concluding, "Thank you for being here and to the small percentage of Americans who actually serve in combat, in uniform, and who have died from their actions."

