

Memorial Day Sunset Ceremony touching under Baird guidance, Walker stirring speech

by Dan Brannan, Content Director
May 26 2015 10:30 PM



The Memorial Day Sunset Ceremony in Alton, under the direction of Richard Baird, showed a tribute to the men and women who sacrificed their lives for America's freedom at the National Cemetery.

Baird pointed out that the Memorial Day Sunset Ceremony in the city is only one of three in the United States and Puerto Rico at this time of day.





He said the grave markers in the National Cemetery in Alton are lasting memorials and those buried there deserve the honors bestowed upon them. There are 548 buried in the Alton cemetery. The first burial was in 1862, he said. Baird encouraged everyone take a moment of silence at the start of program.

Alton Mayor Brant Walker was the keynote speaker and pointed out since the Revolutionary War more than 1.3 million in the U.S. have given their lives while serving in the military and 660,000 of those deaths occurred in combat.

“Words simply cannot do justice to the sacrifice made by the few for the many,” he said. “There’s always a conversation that picks up in our schools, our workplaces and our communities prior to our military and veteran centered holidays such as Memorial Day. People ask, how can we best honor and remember our nation’s veterans and those who have fallen in service to our country?”

In his address, Walker said President (John) Kennedy once said, “As we express our gratitude we must never forget that the highest appreciation is not to utter words, but to

live by them.” Words, he believed, were useless unless accompanied by action. This is why we gather here to honor the few who were so willing to give of themselves to defend our nation.”

Kathy Croxton did the musical introduction at the ceremony; Alton High School students Ryan Haynes and Jackson Frosch performed a percussion assembly.

Donnie Holliday, Dan Whiteside and Marissa Whiteside of the Alton Pipes and Drum played “Scotland The Brave” during the ceremony and the Alton High School R.O.T.C. Color Guard did the presentation of colors.

The Alton High Middle School Honors Choir sang the National Anthem and Alton Middle School sixth graders did the Pledge of Allegiance. Alton Police Chaplain Mark Lane provided the invocation. Susan Parks, a National Cemetery intern, spoke briefly with a greeting and Phyllis Banks was the featured vocalist.

Walker said those present should spend the evening reflecting on the people who were being remembered for their service and sacrifice, and live in gratitude each and every day for the precious gift they have given us.

“When we all walk away from this place this evening, when the weekend is over and the flags have come down, we all must ask ourselves what we, as individuals and as a community, can do to continue to honor the legacy of those who have died for this nation,” he said. “How can we give them something more than a ceremony and a moment’s gratitude?”

“One thing that we can do to honor the legacy of our fallen is to volunteer our time to build a better community, a better state, and a better nation. We must remain a grateful nation, and in so doing, we must seize the opportunity given to us by those who have made the ultimate sacrifice.”

Watch the video of the ceremony below:

Walker added that building a stronger community, and therefore a stronger nation, is the ultimate honor for our fallen.

“They gave their lives to allow us to live freely in the greatest nation on earth. The least we can do is devote some of our time to ensuring that we take our communities to even stronger heights. Whether it be something as simple as picking up litter in our neighborhoods or volunteering with a fraternal organization, we can all find a little time in our lives to contribute to the betterment of our community.”



In closing, Walker recited a poem written during the First World War titled “In Flanders Fields” and written by Canadian physician Lieutenant Colonel John McCrae. This poem references the red poppies that grew over the graves of fallen soldiers and led to the remembrance poppy becoming one of the world’s most recognized memorial symbols for soldiers who have died in conflict.

In Flanders fields the poppies blow

Between the crosses, row on row

That mark our place; and in the sky

The larks, still bravely singing, fly

Scarce heard amid the guns below.

We are the Dead. Short days ago

We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,

Loved and were loved, and now we lie

In Flanders fields.

Take up our quarrel with the foe:

To you from failing hands we throw

The torch; be yours to hold it high.

If ye break faith with us who die

We shall not sleep, though poppies grow

In Flanders fields.

