



Emotions spill over in Memorial Day speech

By Gary Weckselblatt

Quakertown's Memorial Day service received a major jolt of passion, courtesy of the Quakertown Community School District -- its students, teachers and administrators -- who displayed a love and appreciation for America's veterans who went to war to protect our freedoms and never returned home.

The prideful event at Memorial Park, following the majestic sounds and marching of the bands from the high school and Strayer Middle School, included an emotional keynote speech by Dr. Bill Harner, QCSD's superintendent and a 20-year veteran of the U.S. Army.

Harner momentarily broke down when talking about Frank Parker, the high school band director whose father was killed in Vietnam.

"It was very difficult to get through that



part of the speech," Harner said. "I have a deep respect for Frank, his commitment to his students, our program, and his loyalty to the Quakertown Community."

Harner's emotion was not lost on Parker, who stood with his students not far

from where the superintendent spoke. "It's nice to know that he included a personal message to me," Parker said. "It's very nice for him to take that moment."

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The following is a speech written and delivered by Quakertown Community School District Superintendent Dr. Bill Harner, as guest speaker for Quakertown's 2018 Memorial Day Service.

Thank you, Mr. Helm!

Commander Finley, ladies and gentlemen.

Good morning!

As a US Army veteran, I want to thank you and applaud you all for taking the time today - Memorial Day - to spend it with us to recognize those from Quakertown and across our great country, who gave their lives in battle - during the times our nation has been at war. Your attendance role models for younger generations this sacred tradition and creates habits for their behavior for years to come. You reap what you sow!

Memorial Day is one of tremendous importance to our national psyche, whether we gather at the majestic Arlington National Cemetery overlooking Washington DC, or in the thousands of towns across our land similar to this one, here in the lovely Quakertown Memorial Park, we reverently assemble together united with the admiration, love and respect for those who answered the call of selfless duty, but did not make it home alive to be with their family and friends.

Today, in Bucks County, there are more than 20 ceremonies and parades involving thousands of our fellow citizens, who are taking the time to reflect on those soldiers, sailors, and marines who gave the "last full measure." It means a lot to those of us who wore the uniform and have served, and to those families who lost loved ones, that you maintain the tradition of recognizing our comrades who made the ultimate sacrifice. You reap what you sow!

Why is Memorial Day so important to us? Please let me share my own personal reflection of service. The first is, freedom is not free! It requires sacrifice by every American, not just those who decided to don the military uniform. Second, freedom comes from what we sow day to day, right here in Quakertown, and throughout America. My personal reflection comes from my unique perspective of serving our country for 40 years - 20 years in uniform and 20 years in service to local school communities and in service to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. It has been a privilege and honor to have a career in two of the highest callings of service - the military and public education.

The US Constitution is the sine qua non - the foundation of how America comes to its greatness and uniqueness. Our coun-

We reap what we sow



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try, and the 'world order' today would be so different if it were not for the US Constitution that guarantees our freedoms that millions of service women and men have defended, some to their death, over the past 231 years.

To preserve our Constitution requires selfless military service and sacrifice. Have you ever spent a moment thinking about what you were ready and willing to die for? For family,friends,community,country.

If you are a parent, no doubt you have thought about the possibility of giving your life to protect your spouse, your children. Or, if you are not a parent, maybe giving up your life to protect your girlfriend or boyfriend. I know I have! These are logical, quite emotional thoughts that bring tears to our eyes because of love, personal values, human nature, love of country, thinking well above self.

Three years after retiring from military, and serving at the time as a superintendent of a school district in South Carolina, two airplanes were intentionally driven into the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center and one into the Pentagon by terrorists. I was sitting in a middle school library when the first plane hit, being interviewed by 7th grade students, not knowing that when I walked out of that school that my world and our world would be changed forever.

That Sunday, I was sitting in a pew with my family in the back row of our church. I remember like it was yester-

day. I prayed to the the Lord that morning that my phone would ring, that the Army would want me back. I had spent most of 20 years commanding infantry units or planning combat operations. I was very good at it. In the church pew that mid-September day of 2001, I looked over at my young children sitting between my wife and me, and prayed that I would get that call to duty. I would rather fight the "War on Terror" instead of my children having to go to war. I remember my thoughts that morning and the months and years to follow, about getting the call - all while knowing the risks - and prepared to die to protect my children and other Americans. Those in uniform are trained to march off to the sound of the guns. It's our mindset of duty, honor, and country!

I had been in that place before just 10 and a half years prior! In 1990, the leader of Iraq, Saddam Hussein, invaded a small neighboring country called Kuwait. I was on the faculty at West Point at the time, an awesome place to work as we prepared future leaders of the Army. It was far away from the front line of battle as you can get, while still serving in the Army. Down the street from the Superintendent's office, where I worked was the West Point Cemetery. It's the final resting place to some of our nation's most famous war heroes, many who died in battle such as Gettysburg, Little Big Horn, the Ardennes, Korea, Vietnam, Afghanistan and Iraq - today. How can you not have ingrained in you the concept of duty, service, and sacrifice while living near the final resting place of heroes and giants of United States military history.

Saddam had a history of using weapons of mass destruction, especially chemical weapons like nerve agents he used on his Iranian adversary. The Army was expecting up to 25,000 casualties in the fight. I volunteered three times before, the Superintendent of West Point finally gave me permission to go. With a 4-year-old son, and a wife of eight years - who was seven months pregnant - I remember like it was yesterday, standing there in my bedroom tearfully clipping the top of duffle bag knowing that I must go to war. It was my purpose!

While the call never came for me to be called back to active duty after 911, what ensued in our lives I would never have thought possible. Today, both of my children are serving our country in a US Army uniform. My son is a major in the US Army as a doctor, trained to save the lives of soldiers in combat, where he will be very soon. My daughter is a military police officer and Army captain. Already

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Quakertown graduates killed in combat

World War I

C. Russell Leitch
Ivanhoe Metz

World War II

Norman Afflerbach
Russell Allison
George Anders
Alexander Banko
Elmer Barndt
Ralph Beck
William T. Beck
Charles D. Benner
Harry B. Booth
Milton Clymer
John Diehl
Alexander Evanko
Alan R. Fluck
Wayne Frederick
Dominic Giandominico
James Greup
Eugene Hoffman
Thomas Hollowell
James Heist
Paul Huhn
Philip Ingalls
Harry Leister
Harry R. Maurer
William Mengelson
Oswin Moll
Rymond Mundy
Raymond Nice
Joseph Peterson
Raymond F. Pfaff
Maynard Ratzell
Joseph Rickert
Elvin Ring
Uriah Ritter
John Rivers

Milford J. Rodgers
Richard Schaffner
Earl Shaddiger
Rosario Sorbello
Harry Swartz
Gilbert Tice
Earl Wieand

Korea

Herbert Besch
Donald Clayton
Hans Grahl
Edward Keller
Raymond Miller
Clarence F.
Rotenberger
Walter Wentz

Vietnam

Stanley Cope
Paul E. Gross
Gary D. Holland
Donald R. Kemmerer
Atis K. Lielmanis
Philip D. Miller
John R. Millikan
Randal W. Moore
Frank Parker
Ronald Weaver
Kenneth Worman
Larry Lee York

Persian Gulf

Tamarra J. Johnson
Kristin E. Shemely

Iraq

Mark Baum
Kurt Krout Sr.

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with a tour in the 101st Airborne Division, she most recently served in the 3rd US Infantry Regiment - The President's Old Guard, and provided protective services for the current and past president of the United States, during ceremonies at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. She also participated in other ceremonial duties, such as the Flags In Ceremony preparing Arlington National Military Cemetery for Memorial Day Weekend one year ago. Both will spend most of their professional lives serving you and me. We reap what we sow!

Today is about those who got the call, and went, gave "the last full measure," their lives for you and me, and the United States of America. I would like to mention and honor one of our own here in Quakertown who answered the call of duty. In 2009, Staff Sgt. Mark C. Baum, a member of the Pennsylvania Army National Guard's 56th Stryker Brigade Combat Team, was 32 years old with a wife of 10 years, and three very small children - the youngest only 7 months old. When his unit got the call to deploy to Southwest Asia in Iraq to fight in the "War on Terror" he did not hesitate to go. Mark never returned to his family's dinner table. Shortly after arrival in theater, he was shot in the Iraqi city of Mushada while responding to a roadside bomb attack. His story is one of honor, one of duty, and faithful service to country. His story like over 50 more from Quakertown who gave the ultimate sacrifice.

Another family that I think about at this time every year is that of my dear friend and West Point classmate Jimmy Ray. Jimmy and I have been friends since my first day in the Army, we were 18 years old. Jimmy's son, Adam, followed both his father and mother's example and call to service. He served in the 5th Stryker Brigade of the 2nd Infantry Division. Sgt. Adam Ray was killed by an IED in Southern Afghanistan, just a few weeks after his return to war, having spent Christmas leave at home with his loved ones.

My final message to you, as I can not leave without mentioning our schools, our teachers, and our students. The future of our great nation is bright and filled with good news, as we are reaping what we have sown. I could not be any prouder of



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leading Quakertown schools today - we have wonderful teachers and college and career ready students. You don't need to go far to find those with a sense of duty, a patriotism, and love of country. Standing right there is our Marching Band Director, Frank Parker, an awesome teacher that changes the possibilities for students everyday. You see, his commitment to you and your annual Memorial Day Ceremony is bone deep. Frank lost his father during the Vietnam War during an Air Force Combat mission. Memorial Day will always be a day of reverence for him. His commitment to your program role models for his students. In fact, standing there in those band uniforms are brothers who will be attending Penn State on Army ROTC scholarships. Additionally, walking across the stage at graduation next week will be 20 of our graduates who are enlisting in our armed forces or going to college on ROTC scholarships. Our Quakertown faculty and students care deeply for our veterans, and understand that we are in the land of the free because of the brave. They understand the importance of service and sacrifice, and what the US Constitution represents.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my thoughts and reflections with you this morning. May God bless you all for remembering our service women and men who have fallen in combat so that we may be free. We reap what we sow.

Thank you.

Dr. Bill Harner can be reached at wharner@qcsd.org. Follow him on Twitter @BillHarner.

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Each year, Parker speaks with his students about the importance of Memorial Day. "It's a connection my students will always have," he said.

Coincidentally, the theme of Harner's speech, on Memorial Day's 150th anniversary, was that very same historical perspective Parker provides to his students.

"Your attendance role models for younger generations this sacred tradition and creates habits for their behavior for years to come," Harner said. "You reap what you sow!"

Harner, whose speech can be found on pages 2-3, told of his personal struggles following the events of 9/11. He spoke of the selfless nature of America's heroes and their willingness to die to protect their families and our country.

"It was fantastic to have Dr. Harner here so that we have a representative from the school who has served our country," said Dick Helm of Quakertown's American Legion Post 212, who praised Harner's "wonderful message."

"He can speak to the future of our youth."

Several students from the high school played a role in the ceremonies. Ana Handel read "Flanders Fields" and Adam Fischer read "The Gettysburg Address."

Grace Wilson and Micah Kunkle were each awarded the American Legion's Certificate of Distinguished Achievement.

The high school band played a salute to the armed forces, in which veterans stood when their service branch was called. And after the names of the local service members killed in battle were read, followed by a ringing bell, members of American Legion Post 242 and VFW Post 11322 who died in the last year were given a similar sign of respect.

The American Legion Honor Guard performed a rifle salute and high school band member Paul Hand then played Taps.

When the service concluded, several people in the crowd thanked Harner for his speech and his service.

"It was a very special day," Harner said.

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