

Bebensee: The ultimate sacrifice

Written by Elizabeth Barrett

Wednesday, 02 June 2010 20:35 - Last Updated Wednesday, 02 June 2010 20:40



Talented youth took the spotlight Monday morning at Gothenburg Cemetery during annual Memorial Day services.

Two Swede seniors were part of the program as was a Dudley Elementary student.

KaSondra Kuhlman sang the national anthem and Pvt. Coltin Bebensee, a member of the Nebraska Army National Guard, delivered a speech at the service which took place under warm, sunny skies.

Jonah Taylor, a fifth grader at Dudley Elementary, belted out the “Patriot Song.”

Mike Sayer, American Legion vice commander and who served as master of ceremonies, praised the youths for participating in the ceremony.

Legion chaplin Bill Hayward gave the invocation.

The service is sponsored by members of the American Legion and Veterans of Foreign Wars.

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Following is the speech Bebensee presented.



“Today is a day of memories. A day to honor the sacrifices of those who have gone before us and those who have served our country. Memorial Day is defined as a day to pay tribute to those who gave their lives for the freedoms we enjoy. Freedoms we often take for granted.

Today we honor all people who gave of themselves for our country. I look around and see faces of the past. I see faces that have seen the ends of the earth and have gone through fire and back. You have sacrificed so much for our freedom. I look out at the graves and see them marked with a flag and the symbol of the branch they served in. Many of the people laying here gave the ultimate sacrifice in battle. Then I look back to all of you and I can tell that everyone has a story to tell. May they be good or bad, there will always be memories.

Every time I put on my uniform I think of the people who have worn it before me. It may not be the same color or the same branch of military but it’s the same in many symbolic ways. This uniform stands for freedom. Everyone who wears it is a defender of freedom and a protector of peace. Another symbol worn on the uniform is the flag. The flag stands for the peace and freedom of America. I would proudly give my life to let it fly high as many other people have made that sacrifice before me.

The Army has seven values: loyalty, duty, honor, respect, selfless service and personal courage.

Loyalty means to bear true faith and allegiance to the U.S. Constitution, the Army, your unit and other soldiers.

Duty means to fulfill your obligations. Respect means to treat people as they should be treated.

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Selfless service means to put the welfare of the nation, the Army and subordinates before your own.

Honor means to live up to all of the Army's values.

Integrity means to do what's right, legally and morally.

Personal courage means to face fear, danger or adversity, whether physical or moral.

Three of these values stand out to me.

The first one is duty. General Norman Schwarzkopf, who served as commander of the Coalition Forces during the Gulf War, once said, "It doesn't take a hero to order men into battle. It takes a hero to be one of those men who goes into battle."

When the president gave the order to declare war, thousands of brave men and women heard the call of duty and gave their time, and in many cases, their lives for it. When they heard the call, they didn't question it. Some served on the front lines, some in supply offices and some behind a desk but each one of them did the job set for them. Each soldier's call to duty is important to the war effort.

The second value that stands out to me is honor. Honor is not something you can just have but it is something you earn. When past and present military men and women put on the uniform, they are not looking for honor but reflecting on what they do while wearing it. I believe that every veteran, alive or dead, has earned honor through their sacrifices.

The last value that stands out to me is personal courage. To quote Greek historian Thucydides, "The bravest are surely those who have the clearest vision of what is before them, the glory and danger alike, and yet notwithstanding, go out to meet it."

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Courage is hard to find. When it is war time, courage is almost impossible to find. Mark Twain once said, "Courage is resistance to fear, mastery of fear—not absence of fear." Somehow, the men and women of the Armed Forces, past and present, have found the courage to dig down deep, to keep fighting and to work hard to let freedom stand.

To be a soldier you must live by your values. All of you have lived up to your values and I hope someday I can, too.

I have family members who have served in the military. My great uncle, my grandfather and my grandmother, who served as an Army nurse, all served our country. When my grandfather died two years ago, I fully realized that I wanted to serve my country, too.

At his funeral, when "Taps" was played and two sergeants folded the flag, I realized that my grandfather was being honored by his country for his service. I felt differently about my grandfather. I didn't see him as just my grandfather but as a man who proudly served his country. I wish I had taken more time to talk to him about his time in the service.

When I went to enlist and stood before the flag to take my oath, I wasn't just taking it in front of the lieutenant, I was taking it in front of you because you stood in front of the flag and said the same words, "I will defend America."

I remember something my sergeant told me. He said, "War is not an Xbox. It is not a video game. There is no reset button." For years, television shows, movies and video games have glorified war. They make it look cool and sometimes fun. I don't think kids my age and younger fully understand the true cost of war. I'm sure if I asked many of you if war was fun I would get the same answer, "No."

Many people think that when America goes to war all we are doing is taking lives. They could not be more wrong. Yes, in war it may be necessary to take someone's life, but in doing so you may have saved thousands of innocent lives.

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Because of soldiers and veterans like you, the American people and I can sit in our homes and feel safe. I wish there was more we could do to honor you but nothing we could do would ever repay the sacrifices you made for us. I want to honor you today but I would also like to honor the ones that never got to come home, never got a parade, never got to see the war end and never got to say goodbye. So we honor all of you, the true heroes of America.

In closing, I would like to read a poem "It is the Soldier" by Army veteran Charles M. Province:

"It is the Soldier, not the minister

Who has given us freedom of religion.

It is the Soldier, not the reporter

Who has given us freedom of the press.

It is the Soldier, not the poet

Who has given us freedom of speech.

It is the Soldier, not the campus organizer

Who has given us freedom to protest.

It is the Soldier, not the lawyer

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Who has given us the right to a fair trial.

It is the Soldier, not the politician

Who has given us the right to vote.

It is the Soldier who salutes the flag,

Who serves beneath the flag,

And whose coffin is draped by the flag,

Who allows the protester to burn the flag.”

Let us show honor and respect on this Memorial Day for the men and women who fought with great personal courage, for those who gave their lives with honor and for those who stand ready to protect and serve their country when duty calls upon them. May we never forget the sacrifice.

It is soldiers like you, veterans who gave of themselves to protect our values, our freedom, our country. For that, the American people and I stand back and salute you.

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