

Emotional Veteran's Ceremony Held at MPH

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Community News Editor

The entire student body of Mary Putnam Henck Intermediate School sat quietly on the bright green lawn during the school's emotional Memorial Day ceremony on May 25. One hundred-ninety names of deceased veterans were read by several students, after which a student walked over and laid poppies at the bottom of small American flags, which were waving in the breeze.

For years the ceremony has been coordinated by MPH History teacher Richard Sanchez, who is a veteran. The school's principal, Tom Battle, is a retired U.S. Air Force Lieutenant Colonel. It is a custom for MPH school staff members to honor all veterans, but particularly those who have been mountain residents or who were relatives of staff members. Because Battle, former Principal Chris Hunt and Sanchez are veterans, the ceremony has become very important in the school's calendar.

Once the students were seated on the lawn, the program began with the talented members of the Mountain Fifes and Drums walking down the long ramp to the field in their Revolutionary War uniforms, playing patriotic music and bearing the colors. When the flags appeared the veterans snapped to attention and crisply saluted the stars and stripes.

Under the leadership of teacher Karen Tomlinson, the school's choir was joined by some of the veterans and audience members in singing the Star-Spangled Banner. Because we are involved in a war in Iraq, the words took on a special meaning during the ceremony to honor all the country's veterans of wars throughout the ages.

Several students took part in the ceremony, explaining the history of Memorial Day, the significance of the poppy and reading "In Flanders Fields." With perfect weather it was hard not to look around at all the students, the fife and drum corps members, the flags, the honorary rifle range members and the veterans and not be moved by the poem "In Flanders Fields."

Major John McCrae, the English surgeon who wrote the poem while he served on the western front of World War I, found it more than he could bear in 1914 to deal with the suffering and blood he saw day after day. One day he took pen in hand and began to compose what has now become one of the most memorable war poems ever written.

IN FLANDERS FIELDS

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.

After acknowledging the 190 names and the laying of poppies by each flag, Principal Battle reminded the students to remember all those who have lost their lives in Iraq and Afghanistan and the unknown from all wars.

Following a 21-gun salute and Taps by the Riverside National Cemetery honorary rifle team, Battle dismissed the students who left the field in utter silence.

It was impossible to attend without being humbled and moved by the ceremony that had nothing to do with barbecues over Memorial Day weekend but everything to do with honoring the men and women who gave everything in defense of this country.



Many veterans and American Legion members attended the Memorial Day ceremony May 25 at Mary Putnam Henck Intermediate School in Lake Arrowhead. Pictured above, first row, left to right: Frank Smedley, Gary Condurachi, Nick Nerio and Armand LeSage. Second row: Charles Johnson, Don Boucher, MPH History teacher Richard Sanchez, Spike Valencia. MPH Principal Tom Battle. Dale Clauson and James Miller.

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