

By Carolyn Lee

The Imperial Republican

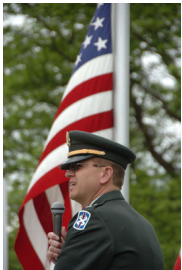
About 200 people visited Mt. Hope Cemetery Monday to remember those who served in our country's military. It was also a time for families to decorate the graves of those who had gone on before.

Pastor David Kahle, a U.S. Army Veteran of Desert Storm, was the featured speaker during the Memorial Day ceremony. Imperial VFW Post 4688 coordinated the service in honor of all fallen veterans.

Memorial Day was originally called Decoration Day. The origin of the day has been attributed to many sources and locations.

However, it was officially proclaimed on May 5, 1868 by General John Logan, national military commander of the Grand Army of the Republic. It was first observed on May 30, 1868, when flowers were placed on the graves of Union and Confederate soldiers at Arlington National Cemetery.

The following is the text of Pastor Kahle's speech.



A memorial: a tribute to our fallen heroes

To have a memorial means to preserve the memory of a person or event. We have gathered in memorial of our fallen comrades in arms.

Memorial Day has been celebrated since the Civil War. Originally it was not called Memorial Day. Instead, it was first termed "Decoration Day." To decorate something is to mark it as special or important. We will decorate our homes, our trees, but today we decorate those who gave their lives. Decorating the men and women who have died while in military service does more than preserve a memory. Decorating our fallen heroes keeps them alive.

We may not be able to touch their hands or hear their voices, but they are indeed alive among us today. We have them among us in the benefits that we receive from their sacrifice. It was through their blood spilled on national and foreign soils that we are able to live in our nation of freedom. Because of the price that they paid, we go about our daily vocations and enjoy liberties without fear of death.

In a world where people always want to control, it takes a sacrifice to keep freedom. It is the soldier that makes the sacrifice to preserve freedom for another. Some soldiers sacrifice their time in this world giving a few years of service, and some will dedicate a career in the armed forces. We are thankful for the men and women who continue to bring us freedom.

But today we remember those who gave more than a few years or a full career. Today we remember those who gave all, they gave their lives to ensure we can stand here free today.

Let me share something that helped my awareness of those who fought and died did for me. I am a veteran of Desert Storm. This is often referred to as the first Iraqi conflict. Before I had been on that foreign soil very long, I realized that it was a war about freedom.

This war was started with the specific purpose of removing a bully from the lands of Kuwait. It was started to give our Kuwaiti brothers the same freedoms that we enjoy in our country. In this

conflict I held two positions. These positions gave me some insight into what freedom is and what it takes to get there.

First, I was a gunner on a Bradley fighting vehicle. This is a light armor tank used in reconnaissance and troop transport. It is armored with a 25mm Bushmaster cannon, 7.62mm chain gun, TOW missiles and is still used in our military today.

I held this position on the Bradley which was commanded by our squadron Operations officer or S-3. Working under him allowed me to work in military tactical operations but also to use my skills as a weapons operator on this vehicle. While on deployment to Iraq, I also served as driver for our squadron executive officer or XO.

While going from gunner of a Bradley to driver of a Humvee may seem like a step down, this position allowed me to interact with the Iraqi nationals because the XO was a Foreign Area Office (FAO) for Arab speaking countries. He was fairly fluent in Arabic, and he was as bold as a fox in a hen house. His zeal often found us in situations that made me quite uncomfortable.

In my first job in that desert I learned that many before me had fought and died to improve the tactics and weapons that I enjoyed. It was working in the second position that I began to realize how I take my freedom for granted. We worked with people that really couldn't define freedom, because they never really had it. Freedom is a wonderful thing, but taking freedom for granted we cannot afford.

We commemorate our fallen comrades this day because they fought and died for our freedom. Sometimes we know those who have made this sacrifice, and sometimes we have no idea who they were. As I worked in those two positions during the War against Iraq, I became acutely aware of what must have been accomplished prior to the success that I enjoyed as a soldier.

As we rolled across sand dunes, through rocky crags, amidst the Bedouin people, though villages of frightened foreigners, I began to realize that we are fighting a war that we could win. We were using tactics, equipment and weapons that had been tested, approved and learned by men and women that I had never met, nor had I heard of.

It was through their sacrifice on the canvass of countless battlefields, prior to the one on which I stood, that they earned for me the knowledge of winning warfare. As I fought in this battle and traveled this foreign land, I began to see everything in a different light. Each tactic that we used to fight this opponent, each weapon that we fired, each piece of equipment that fulfilled its intended purpose; these things all worked and worked well because we as a military learned how to fight wars, create better weapons and then use improved tactics and weapons together.

As I was cleaning weapons one day I ask myself, "How did they fight wars before we had all these things?" This is where I began to realize that someone died in the process of learning what I knew for the war I fought in. It was through their sacrifice that I was well trained, well armed and well prepared.

What do we do with the knowledge that our fallen heroes give us? For every citizen, live in this country doing your various vocations to the best of your abilities. Do not complain about the problems that freedom brings. As a country, we must continue to kick the tar out of those who stand in the way of freedom.

Warfare is never a pleasant option, but if you are going to go to war then go to win. I will gladly admit that it was not I alone, or the men who fought with me, who helped to successfully route Saddam and his armies from Kuwait that spring. It was in fact the efforts of every soldier before me that carried us through that war and then home afterward. While they may not have

made it home themselves, our boundaries are secure because of their efforts.

We have things in this country that Iraq did not have. We have children who play in the parks and go to school. We have people that travel our highways and work in towns and cities. Most, if not all of them, never give a thought when they wake in the morning of whether they will live or die. Most go about their tasks living because of the sacrifices of others and the whole time forgetting those who paid for their freedoms. Today we, as a country, remember those sacrifices.

Today we do not forget. Our Savior Jesus Christ once said, "Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends." (John 15:13)

What about our fallen sacrificial friends? Today we remember what they have done. They laid down their lives in wars they didn't understand. They laid down their lives in lands they didn't know. They laid down their lives for freedom, country, friends, families and lovers. They laid down their lives for children and grandchildren they would never even meet. They laid down their lives as a sacrifice in love for you.

Today we make a small sacrifice of time as a memorial to them. We have stopped our lives to remember. We have laid down our lives for this moment, this morning and today. While it won't cost us much, it does help us to remember that freedom isn't really free, instead it was given for a cost.

May we never forget and thereby keep alive those who gave their lives that we might enjoy what we have this day. Freedom! God, thank you for those who have given their lives, God bless those who serve and God bless the U.S.A.!