

MEMORIAL: Pendleton speaker grateful for daughter’s return from Syria

Continued from 1A

when he was killed by small arms fire in the Binh Dinh province.

Across Umatilla County, VFW Post 922 held a similar ceremony at Pendleton’s Olney Cemetery, seeking respite from the late morning sun by conducting most of the proceedings under the shade of some trees.

Among a series of short speeches and prayers, pastor Chris Clemons said monuments have acted as a way to pass on stories and legacies since ancient times.

Gravesites are no different, Clemons said, especially those belonging to veterans.

“The story of stone,” as Clemons referred to it, was told throughout Olney Cemetery.

On Memorial Day, American flags were placed on each headstone where a veteran was interned, spanning World War I, World War II, Korea, Vietnam and other conflicts.

But Memorial Day isn’t just for the dead and their families, but also for living veterans and their families.

Pendleton Wal-Mart manager Shawn Nulf gave the keynote speech, explaining the origins of Memorial

Day and sharing some of the early anxiety she had in speaking at the ceremony.

I thought, ‘How can I bear this burden ... (But I realized,) it’s an honor to be here, not a burden,’ she said.

Nulf was selected for the work Wal-Mart does with veterans, and also because she has a daughter active in the Oregon National Guard who recently returned from a one-year tour in Syria.

After the ceremony concluded, Nulf said Memorial Day made her reflect on the gratitude she had for her daughter returning from war intact, but also those who didn’t.

“Not everyone has the same story,” she said.

Nulf’s daughter, Chyanne Kohler, wasn’t able to attend the ceremony but echoed many of the comments her mother made at Olney Cemetery in a phone interview from Salem, where’s she’s based.

Working in a medical support unit, Kohler provided dispatch services for the troops in battle in Syria.

Although everyone in her unit came back to Oregon, Kohler said she thought of the personnel that wasn’t able to make it back.

Originally interested in the National Guard as a way



Staff photo by Jayati Ramakrishnan
A member of the U.S. Army Honor Guard plays “Taps” at the end of the Memorial Day ceremony in Hermiston.

to pay her tuition to Portland State University, Kohler, 24, said she values the relationships she’s built in the service.

Kohler’s in striking distance of obtaining her bachelor’s degree, but she doesn’t

plan on leaving the Guard any time soon.

“They’d have to kick me out,” she said, laughing.

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Staff photos by Jayati Ramakrishnan
Members of the VFW, American Legion and spectators stand as they salute the flag during the Memorial Day Ceremony at Hermiston Cemetery.



Staff photo by Kathy Aney
Oliver McAllister and his grandmother, Shawna Nulf, made a patriotic pair Monday at the Memorial Day ceremony at Olney Cemetery in Pendleton. Nulf, manager of the Pendleton Walmart, spoke during the ceremony.

FALLEN: If we don’t tell their stories nobody will

Continued from 1A

He remembered the story of one fellow Marine, Sgt. Rafael Peralta, who was up for the Medal of Honor, and received the Navy Cross, which is awarded for bravery in combat. Homer recalled that Peralta dove on a grenade while their battalion was clearing out buildings in downtown Fallujah.

Homer said he put the display up on Friday so it would be visible all weekend. He said many people have stopped by, with a family

driving down from Walla Walla just to see the display.

Homer said none of the families of those named in the memorial stopped by, as most of them are scattered around the country. He and Wheeler don’t keep in touch with many of the family members of those in their battalion who died. But the ones who survived, he said, have an annual reunion.

Homer said he will take



Homer

the display down at the end of Memorial Day, but because of positive reactions from his neighbors and others who saw the display, he is thinking about making it an annual project.

“It’s kind of quiet patriotism,” he said. “I don’t want to shove it down anybody’s throat, but just honor the guys that mean a lot to me.”

Wheeler served from 2001 to 2005, and Homer from

2003 to 2011. They were in the same vehicle in Iraq at one point, Wheeler said.

“This is just my way of honoring them,” Homer said. “If we don’t tell their stories, nobody will.”

The Iraq war began in 2003 and ended in 2011. Close to 5,000 American soldiers were estimated to have been killed, as well as hundreds of thousands of civilians.

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