



PHOTOS BY CINDY WEELDREYER/FOR THE COTTAGE GROVE SENTINEL

The Veterans Park Ceremony concluded with Dale Cuyler playing Taps before the Veterans Memorial Rock.

## Grovers gather to honor, remember vets

By Cindy Weeldreyer  
For The Sentinel

It was a rare sun-kissed morning for a Monday in late May within Western Oregon as approximately 175 residents came together May 28 for Cottage Grove's Memorial Day Services.

The event was planned by members of American Legion Post 32, and the Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 3473.

Lieutenant Eric Haan, a United States Navy Reservist and former Commander of the local American Legion Post, welcomed the crowd gathered in the historic Armory for the 11 a.m. ceremony. He also acknowledged the symbolic remembrance table set in front of the stage to honor those individuals still listed as a prisoner of war or missing in action.

After local bagpiper Tom McVey and members of the Boy Scouts Troop 140 presented the colors, Haan led the Pledge of Allegiance. Student Jennifer Simons sang the National Anthem and Trinity Lutheran Pastor Jim Markus offered a prayer. Mayor Jeff Gowing, a member of the American Legion Post who served in the Army from 1982-88 on bases in Washington, Hawaii and Texas, gave a meaningful message.

He said as a young boy he attended the local Memorial Day ceremonies. When he heard the list of names read of veterans who died in the previous year, they were familiar names of friends of his parents and grandparents and of people known in the community.

Among the names read this year was a co-worker and another was a good friend he made in 2009 on the annual motorcycle ride to Washington, D.C., who died just three days before this year's ride.

"The older I get these names become much more personal to me," he said. "These names are more than a name. They are someone's spouse, parent, grandparent, child, aunt, uncle, cousin, co-worker or friend."

At the end of his message, Gowing introduced Lil Thompson, a gold star sister.

Her brother Sgt. William



Members of the American Legion Riders and the Oregon Veterans Motorcycle Association participate in the procession from the Armory down Main Street to Veterans Park.

Stubbs was just 20 years old when he went missing on Oct. 20, 1969. He is still listed as one of the Vietnam War's MIAs. She said their father was a career military officer who served 22 years in the Army and moved the family often with new duty assignments.

"We were very close friends because we traveled a lot as an Army family," she said. "When Bill reached military draft age he chose to enlist as a Green Beret. It was many years before his mission was declassified and we were told he was in Laos when he went missing."

The Army's Green Berets are a special operations force tasked with five primary missions: un-conventional warfare, foreign internal defense, special reconnaissance, direct action and counter-terrorism.

"I will always miss my brother. This October it will be 49 years since he's been gone," Thompson said. "Every day I fly the POW/MIA flag because I respect and honor him for doing what was right, especially at that time in our history. I'm really sad he never got to meet my family."

Thompson said the most difficult part for an MIA family is having no place to put flowers to honor the memory of their loved one. With family in Oregon and Washington, before her father died in 1995, he requested to be buried in the National

Cemetery in Portland, with a marker for his MIA son placed next to his.

"It was a tumultuous time in America from 1969 to 1973, Thompson told the crowd. "Because returning war veterans were not treated well, I always take every opportunity to thank them." She added, "The family I grew up in is now all gone, so remembering them on Memorial Day is very important to me."

Following her remarks, Lt. Haan announced the names of the Vietnam-era veterans inducted this year on the Wall of Honor inside the American Legion Hall.

They are: Gary Ladd, Hubert VanPoll, Milo Stratton and Lawrence Heckman. Jennifer Simons again took the stage to sing America the Beautiful.

VFW Commander Dennis Twite read the names of those veterans who died since last year's Memorial Day. Celia Gowing, a member of the Women's Auxiliary, transferred a red rose from one vase to another as Mike Flint solemnly rang a bell.

After Lt. Haan read the Gettysburg Address and Pastor Markus gave a closing prayer, the colors were retired by the Boy Scouts with Tom McVey playing the Ballad of the Green Berets.

The crowd spilled out of the Armory to participate in a remembrance procession under a bright blue, cloudless sky. It was

led by members of the American Legion Riders and Oregon Veterans Motorcycle Association to the Veterans Memorial Park on Main Street next to the Centennial Covered Bridge.

After a 21-gun salute, Leonard Waitman, now a frail World War II Veteran, and Korean War Veteran Mel Gowing had the honor of dropping the remembrance wreath off the bridge into the river. The ceremony ended with Dale Cuyler playing Taps on his trumpet.

Participants were then invited to the nearby American Legion Hall for refreshments and to observe Gowing place the four memorial plaques on the Wall of Honor.

Mayor Gowing said he was pleased with the large turnout, particularly after his initial concern when the ceremony was incorrectly reported as happening on Saturday.

"For too many, Memorial Day has lost its solemn significance and has become the official kick-off of summer with camping and BBQs," Gowing said. "I'm glad so many people came to re-member those who gave up their tomorrows so we could have our todays."

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