

Halbert Leftridge of Susquehanna Twp. walks past graves after placing flowers on the grave of a relative with the help of his wife, Wyonella, and daughter, Janis Leftridge. The Leftridges grow their own flowers in their garden to place on the graves of relatives on Memorial Day.



DAN GLEITER, The Patriot-News

# 'We remember them'

Midstate residents gathered at William Howard Day Cemetery to honor veterans, and 2 high school students won scholarships.

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The 95-degree temperature felt hot enough to wilt both flowers and people on Monday during the 26th annual

Memorial Day program at the William Howard Day Cemetery in Swatara Twp.

Yet that didn't keep dozens of people from attending the hourlong program and from making pilgrimages to the graves of loved ones in the hilly 43-acre cemetery high above Steelton.

The ceremony focused on past sacrifices veterans made and future achievements of

high school students who received scholarships from the cemetery. Local broadcaster George Toby Young Jr. served as master of ceremonies.

The program began with a parade of flags by the Ancient Egyptian Order Nobles of the Mystic Shrine Himyar Temple 17. After an invocation and scripture reading, Harrisburg

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Dimitri Reeves, 8, of Philadelphia, watches as Tom Wiley of the Ancient Egyptian Order Nobles of the Mystic Shrine Himyar Temple 17 walks by as part of a presentation of the colors. With Dimitri is his grandmother, Clorease Slade of Philadelphia, center, and great-grandmother, Mary L. Lee of Steelton.

## CEMETERY

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Mayor Linda Thompson spoke, calling Memorial Day "bittersweet."

The mayor praised William Howard Day, who became the first African-American school director in the United States when he was elected director of the Harrisburg school system from 1878 to 1900. Day, a decorated veteran of the U.S.-Mexican War, is buried in the cemetery that bears his name.

Thompson also traced the history of African-Americans fighting for American ideals since the 1700s, then saluted them for giving their all to the country, which originally treated them badly.

"African-Americans served with distinction and honor in every war in our nation's history," she said. "We remember them."

Later in the program, Thompson delighted the crowd when she stood up and sang a spirited version of "Can I Get a Witness?" with 10 singers from the Charles Donahue Male Chorus of First Baptist Church of Swatara Twp.

"I feel the call to sing with you," she told them. State Sen. Jeffrey Piccola, R-Dauphin County, called Memorial Day a time to show gratitude to those who died for this country.

"It was not preachers who gave us freedom of religion," he said. "It was our veterans. It was not politicians who gave us the freedom to vote. It was our veterans. Memorial Day is not about us. It's about those who served and died for us."

Joseph Robinson Jr., executive director of the South Central Pennsylvania Sickle Cell Council, said veterans didn't fight to defend a nation that spends more than it earns, taxes excessively and poorly oversees programs supported by those taxes.

"Our soldiers are not fighting to see our economy weakened and our unemployment escalate while middle-class producing jobs are shipped outside our borders," he said. "Our brave men and women are fighting to preserve the Declaration of Independence's promise."

Ten members of Signs

of Love from St. Paul's Missionary Baptist Church of Harrisburg performed "These Are the Days" and "We Lift our Hands," clapping and swaying as they communicated through sign language.

The ceremony concluded with recognition of 13 students from Central Dauphin East, Harrisburg, Sci Tech and Susquehanna Twp. high schools. Two \$2,000 scholarships were awarded to Ray Burnett Jr. of Sci Tech High School, who will study psychology at Medaille University in Buffalo, N.Y., and Monique Frasier of Susquehanna Twp. High School, who will major in communications and journalism at Shippensburg University.

Throughout the cemetery, people decorated the graves of family members with red carnations, white chrysanthemums, purple gladiolus, pink and red roses and small American flags.

Lance Burgess Jr. of Harrisburg took carnations to the graves of his father, sister and mother, Clara M. Burgess, who died four months ago.

"She was a great mother, grandmother and great-grandmother," he said. "She loved the family. On Memorial Day, we always came here and put flowers on family graves. Then we would have a big cookout. It's a sad day being here without her."

Lynn Sadowy of Harrisburg rode her motorcycle to the cemetery then stood in quiet reflection at the graves of her parents, David and Eleanor Waid, and brother, David Waid Jr.

"My parents died when I was in my 20s," she said. "I'm 54 and still miss them. I remember my parents taking us to the Philadelphia Zoo and to family reunions and picnics. I remember making vanilla ice cream that we kids had to churn. I remember going to picnics at my grandmother's house in Bressler. I think of all the good times."

Elsewhere in the cemetery, flags fluttered in the gentle wind. Trees rustled. People knelt, praying and wiping tears from their eyes. Some reminisced about what was. Others mourned for what never will be again, then stood up and quietly left the cemetery.