

NCHS students hear history from veterans who made it

By Laura Kenyon

They came in uniform, suits and tropical button-downs. Most traveled down the aisle on their own two feet, a few with some extra help. A handful were accompanied by their sweethearts while others flew solo, but not a single one was alone.

On Friday, May 25, more than 50 veterans attended an assembly in their honor at New Canaan High School.

NCHS senior Lindsay Schanzer sang the National Anthem, after which past and current warriors — from World War II, the Korean War, the Vietnam War and the War in Iraq — spoke to an auditorium full of fellow veterans and students.

“I’ve been many things in my life — a son, a father, a brother, a coach — but one of the roles which I am most proud of,” Korean War vet Pete Barella said, “is that of a soldier.”

As the veterans listened to their comrades and rose to hear brief snapshots of their own life stories, their faces showed emotions only they could fully understand. Unlike some political honorees, who fidget or look toward the ground as their achievements are read, the veterans stood fast,

hung on each word and emanated an undeniable pride in their accomplishments.

They seemed lost in memory as they watched a film, created by NCHS students Jennifer Spindel and Kiera Tulla, which set grainy battle footage, snapshots of brothers in arms, and quotations from leaders such as Franklin Delano Roosevelt and Dwight D. Eisenhower to a musical score.

“One’s country is worth dying for, and democracy is worth dying for, because it’s the most deeply honorable form of government ever devised by man,” Ronald Reagan’s voice faded in after “If Everyone Cared,” a song by Nickelback. “All of you loved liberty. All of you were willing to fight tyranny, and you knew the people of your countries were behind you.”

NCHS Principal Tony Pavia told his students that the primary purpose of the ceremony was to remember the meaning of Memorial Day.

“It will be a weekend of picnics and parties and beautiful weather,” he said. “But it should also be a weekend that we remember those that came before us and those who made the ultimate sacrifice for their country.”

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NCHS students Jacklyn Lionetti (center) and Kelly Franklin (right), admire a trinket World War II veteran Joe Shawinsky fastened out of scraps of metal. Mr. Shawinsky fought on the island of Iwo Jima and witnessed firsthand the destruction at Nagasaki after the second atomic bomb. (Laura Kenyon Photo)

Veterans: Students share their stories

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It is important, he added, “not only to remember those that lost their lives, but to celebrate the living.” Superintendent of Schools Dr. David Abbey urged the students to “listen, learn and reflect on” the importance of Memorial Day, as they will be responsible for “passing it on” to the coming generations.

“As we celebrate this great tradition, today and throughout

the weekend, it is vital that we never forget that amidst all of the wonderful pageantry and patriotic rhetoric, there is a cold reality that cannot be forgotten or minimized,” he said. “The historical bill that is paid for this day, and will forever be due, comes in the form of broken bodies, broken families and broken dreams. The magnitude of the sacrifice and contribution is such that, in some way, every day should really be a Memorial Day and a day of remembrance.”

NCHS grad earns commission at Air National Guard Academy

Forrest S. Kimes of New Canaan recently graduated from the Air National Guard Academy of Military Science at McGhee Tyson Air National Guard Base, Knoxville, Tenn., and was commissioned as a second lieutenant in the Air National Guard.

The six-week, in-resident course curriculum is designed to prepare the officer candidate for initial assignment as a commissioned officer and to serve as a foundation to build a career in the Air Force Reserve components. The major subject areas of instruction included military studies, physical training, academic studies, professional development, communicative skills, leadership and manage-

ment, international security and defense studies.

After graduation, the lieutenant either attends further career development training or returns to his or her resident state unit of assignment.

Lt. Kimes is an air battle manager with the 103rd Air Control Squadron, Orange Air National Guard Base, Conn.

He is the son of New Canaan Probate Judge Russell A. and the Rev. Nicki Kimes of East Avenue.

The lieutenant graduated in the year 2000 from New Canaan High School, and received a bachelor’s degree in 2006 from the University of Connecticut in Storrs.

Vietnam veteran and father of two NCHS students Ed McSorley spoke about his experience as a Marine in 1968, a year when almost 15,000 U.S. servicemen were killed. After being wounded and returning home, he said that the attitude towards those who fought at the time was so bad, he told people he was injured in a motorcycle accident.

But the experience turned out to be “the cornerstone of my life,” he said, and he would do it again “in a heartbeat.”

“One thing they taught me in the Marines is to work smart. You always have a plan,” he said. “You always have a backup plan. The reality is in war those plans get blown away in the first two seconds. So (we) learned how to adapt and to overcome.”


In many ways familiar with how disheartening a lack of support from the American people can be during a time of war, NCHS physics teacher and U.S. Naval Reserves Lt. Cmdr. Tony Barnett — who recently returned from a tour of duty in Iraq — got choked up when he spoke about the first time someone stopped him in an airport and said, “Thank you.”

“How do you explain to a two-year-old that they’re not tears of sadness but tears of joy?” he asked. “The simple two-word phrase of ‘thank you’ means a lot.”



James D’Acosta (left), who spent a year in Japan as part of the 25th infantry occupation army after World War II, and Joseph Kelly, who was awarded a Purple Heart and Bronze Star for his service during World War II, applaud NCHS students for their Memorial Day ceremony last week.
(Laura Kenyon Photo)

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