



Mike McCollum

Marine Cpl. Danny Brozowski salutes as his lifelong friend Albert Rojas cradles flag at Plaza event.

Solemn Veterans Day ceremony

By JUDY BRILL
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As if on cue, the sun broke through gray clouds and warmed the Plaza in downtown Watsonville just in time for Veterans Day ceremonies yesterday.

A crowd of about 50 vets and members of the local VFW ladies auxiliaries turned out to honor those who have served their country in the military.

The observance was made possible the American Legion Post 121, the Freedom VFW Post 1716 and the city of Watsonville.

Heralded by a trumpet's "Call to Colors," the VFW Post 1716 honor guard hoisted three flags — Old Glory, the state flag and the black POW/MIA banner.

Following the Pledge of Allegiance, the national anthem and an invocation, former Watsonville Mayor Ann Soldo took the microphone.

When Soldo was elected 10 years ago, she became the city's first woman mayor. Among her accomplishments, Soldo worked to re-establish the city's Veterans Day observance which had over the years suffered from neglect and eventually been abandoned.

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— Ex-Mayor Ann Soldo

Watsonville's involvement in military service dates back to the Spanish-American War. "Without them," she said, "America would not be free."

Harold Hyde, a veteran and fifth-generation Watsonville resident, followed Soldo, and recalled the origin of Veterans Day.

Hyde read a page from his father's diary, written during World War I from the French front. The entry was dated Nov. 11, 1918:

"At 11:11 it came. The big bell in the town started it off and then from every bell in the city the answer came. It seemed they would crack all to pieces, but they rang and rang and rang. The people rushed to the street or put their heads out of the windows to see what it was about, a dazed, puzzled expression in their faces, as if it was impossible to believe.

"And the flags, American, French, British, were there, and Italian and Belgian. Women would rush up to American soldiers and throw their arms around them, saluting them

with a hearty smack. Everywhere the Americans were most popular; children would be brought up to see the American soldiers."

"This is what happened in 1918 for two Watsonville boys, the class of 1916 at Watsonville High School," Hyde said.

Since then, every year, in the 11th month, on the 11th day, at the 11th hour, that day in 1918 is remembered.

Hyde also noted that on this day in Washington, D.C., a monument was being dedicated at the Vietnam Memorial to the 265,000 "brave, compassionate women" who served during the Vietnam War.

Hyde offered a history of women in service, beginning with a "scattering of service" in the Revolutionary and the Civil wars, to establishment in 1901 of the Army Nurse Corps, to the creation during World War II of such groups as the WAC (Women's Army Corps), the WAVES (Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service in the Navy), the Marine Corps Women's Reserve and the

WASPS (Women's Air Corps Service Pilots).

"But women could not give orders to men, their ranks were different and their pay was less," Hyde said, "and only the Army allowed them to serve overseas. But still they volunteered, and still they served ..."

By the end of the war there were more than 12 million women in the service. The ranks of women declined after that. About 500 served in Korea, and 11,000 served in Vietnam; 80 died there.

"Today with the dedication of this memorial in Washington, all of us have the chance to say thank you."

Emmett Connor took the podium next. Connor joined the armed forces in 1940 and became an aircraft gunner. He was a flight instructor during World War II and was adjutant of the 341st Bomb Squadron during the Korean War. He retired after 23 years to become a schoolteacher.

"Today we pause to remember all who have served their country," Connor said, "and particularly those who have served in times of war, those who were or may be prisoners of war, and those who were reported as missing in action."

See VETS / back of section ▶

Connor recalled the days gone by when church bells around the nation would ring out on Armistice Day. He recited the total worldwide casualties of World War I — 8.5 million dead, 21 million wounded, 7.5 million taken prisoner or missing in action. The numbers are worse for World War II — 35 million dead, another 10 million victims of Nazi death camps.

He ticked off all the wars and conflicts in which Americans have served, adding, "Around the world, there are 45 wars or conflicts raging, where people are trying to establish some semblance of order and peace in their lives. But unfortunately, wars and conflicts have been with us since the beginning of time, and I doubt very much whether we'll ever see the end of it."

He said that instead of viewing the past "from the very lofty perspective of the present," we should try to understand the past in terms of those different times and circumstances.

Connor also commented that there were no younger people attending the ceremonies, and that perhaps it was time to teach respect and gratitude for veterans and the nation's armed services in the schools and other areas of the community.

As the ceremonies concluded with the placing of a memorial wreath, a gun salute, the playing of Taps and a singing of "God Bless America," there were tears in many eyes.

Among those in the audience so moved was Aptos resident Nancy Newton, who served with the Army Nurse Corps in the Korean War. Newton said her tears were for her husband, William, a 25-year U.S. Coast Guard veteran of three wars who died a few years ago.