

Memorial Day message honors the fallen, not just those who served

BY VICKI HENDERSON
HIGH PLAINS NEWS

NORTON — Memorial Day services were held at 11:30 a.m. Monday, May 25, at the Norton Cemetery, with American Legion Harmonson Redd Post No. 63 Commander Steve Herredsberg conducting the service.

Jeff Burton, a United States Army veteran and Purple Heart recipient, served as the featured speaker.

Burton was stationed at Fort Riley in Kansas and Fort Campbell Military Base in Kentucky from 2000 through 2007. During his military career, he served five tours of duty, including Operation Bright Star in Egypt from September to November 2001; guarding the Pentagon from April to October 2002; Operation Iraqi Freedom from 2003 to 2004; Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan from 2005 to 2007; and Operation Iraqi Freedom from 2009 to 2010.

“You see, this holiday is for SFC Shane Koele and the many others that gave their lives for our country.”

JEFF BURTON
UNITED STATES ARMY
VETERAN

He was awarded the Purple Heart after being wounded in action. When he retired from the Army and National Guard, he had



During Memorial Day services at Norton Cemetery are, from left, Jeremy Wetter playing taps, Bob Stevenson, Tara Esslinger, Kevin Esslinger, Roy Skrdlant, Joe Durham, Bruce Anderson, Barb Goeken, Walter Skrdlant and, in front, Buddy Posson. United States Army veteran Jeff Burton was the featured speaker for the Memorial Day service at Norton Cemetery. *Photos by Vicki Henderson*

attained the rank of staff sergeant.

In addition to the Purple Heart, Burton received three Army Achievement Medals, four Army Commendation Medals, two Army Good Conduct Medals, a Meritorious Unit Commendation, an Army Service Ribbon, a Joint Service Commendation Medal, a National Defense Medal, a Global War on Terrorism Expeditionary Medal, a Global War on Terrorism Service Medal, a NATO Medal, an Armed Service Medal, a Joint Service Accommodation Medal, an Army Overseas Medal, an Air Assault Badge, a Combat Action Badge and one Silver German Armed Forces Marksmanship Badge.

Burton opened his

remarks by thanking those who attended the service and reflecting on the history of Memorial Day.

“This day was first observed on May 30, 1868, which was first known as Decoration Day,” Burton said. “This was to honor the Union soldiers killed in the Civil War.”

He said Congress changed the observance to the last Monday in May in 1968, and the name Memorial Day was standardized in 1971.

Burton said he initially thought he would offer a newer generation’s perspective on military service, but his thoughts kept returning to one fallen soldier.

“You see, this holiday is for SFC Shane Koele and the many others that gave their lives for our country,” Burton said.

Burton said Koele was a military police soldier

from Wayne, Nebraska, whom he served with at Fort Riley. Their deployments together included Operation Bright Star in Egypt in 2001, guarding the Pentagon in 2002 and the invasion of Iraq in 2003.

Koele later deployed again to Iraq with a new company. On his third deployment, he was killed March 16, 2005, in Afghanistan when his Humvee ran over a double-stacked land mine, Burton said.

Burton said word of Koele’s death spread among former members of the 300th Military Police Company.

“This is when I had my first true understanding of what Memorial Day is about,” Burton said.

Burton said he later had the privilege of living for a year at Bagram Air Base in Afghanistan in SFC



Koele Village, known by military police as MP Village.

He said studying remembering fallen service members made him think about the common misunderstanding of

thanking veterans on Memorial Day.

“So, I will leave this speech with a final thing,” Burton said. “Thank the father, mother, wife or husband of a fallen service member.”

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