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Dexter Celebrates Honor Tour

APRIL 29TH 2011 BY NEWS

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ShowMe Times Editor*

They were from communities like Dexter, Bloomfield, Essex, Poplar Bluff, and Cape Girardeau. And as young men they put their lives on the line in p Bastogne, Normandy, Sicily, in the Coral Sea and at Midway, and in the skies over Dresden, and at places like Pointe du Hoc and Omaha Beach.

Today, they are living testaments to the courage, conviction, bravery and tenacity that saved the Free World six decades ago.

And on Friday, the area came to salute them, their generation and a group departing on a different type of “tour of duty” – the Honor Tour for veterans of World War II. It was a patriotic rally unlike most any other; a multi-generational celebration of America and the men and women who fought for their country.

The Bearcat Event Center was “filled to the rafters” with students, families, fellow veterans, friends and community leaders to salute the 30 men who departed on an Honor Tour of Washington, D.C. to see “their” memorial – the National World War II Memorial.

School children from Southwest and Central schools marched into the BEC like young soldiers – all with white shirts with the American flag – and sat on one side of the BEC,

while middle school and DHS students on the opposite side. The DHS Jazz band and the Honors Choir both participated, and high school students carried American flags and served as escorts. .

A large group of Dexter High School students formed two long lines down the center aisle of the BEC with large American flags to create a walkway for Honor Tour veterans walked through on the way to seats of honor. The DHS Jazz Band under the direction of Scott Rybolt played “2001 Space Odyssey” and “In The Mood.” Seated behind the Honor Tour men were their families and fellow veterans.

On the program were Dexter Supt. Dr. Thomas Sharp, U.S. Rep. Jo Ann Emerson, State Sen. Rob Mayer, State Rep. Billy Pat Wright and Jennifer Kasten of U.S. Senator Roy Blunt’s staff.

U.S. Rep. Jo Ann Emerson told the group that she had hoped to be in Washington, D.C. this weekend to greet them at the World War II Memorial. However she has been in the area all week and will be here through the weekend to work with constituents and agencies fighting the flood.

“Here among all the folks in Dexter - this is the heart and soul of America,” she said. “We are here today because of each and every one of you. None of you would ever call yourselves heroes. But we can call you heroes because in your humbleness you have watched out for us, you have given us all the tools that we have to carry on and make a much better community and a much better country. We thank you for your service to our country and the sacrifice that you made.”

Emerson said she hoped the travelling veterans would remember that when they get off the bus at the World War II Memorial that that memorial was a “small token” to thank and honor their service and for “serving as role models for your children and grandchildren.”

Guest speaker for the morning was Charles Kruse, Dexter High School graduate, area farmer, former president of the Missouri Farm Bureau and a retired brigadier general in the Missouri National Guard.

“Today, Dexter, Missouri is standing tall,” Kruse said He commended Sharp and the school district’s administration and faculty for their work in planning the ceremony. “The Dexter Public School s has really made a great showing here and made us all proud.”

Kruse noted that the chairman of the community committee that planned Friday morning's event, Dr. Roger Alsup, was unable to attend the ceremony. Alsup is the principal at T.S. Hill Middle School and is a veteran of the Iraq War.

"Roger was so proud that the Dexter Public Schools were going to be involved in this activity," Kruse said. "It's quite ironic that Roger is not able to be with us today because he is on his way to St. Louis to Jefferson Barracks with his daughter Katie. Katie and many other members of the Missouri National Guard soldiers are going to be deployed to Afghanistan."

Kruse asked the audience to keep Katie and all area residents in serving in the military in their thoughts and prayers.

"The word 'hero' should not be used often. It should be used to describe the best of the best; the bravest of the brave' people we hold up and honor for doing great deeds," Kruse. "We are privileged to have the opportunity to honor 30 special heroes – 30 veterans of World War II."

Veterans at the ceremony had their own stories to tell, Kruse said. They were all young men when they went off to war.

"Think about that – being a teenager and being told that you are going to war – being told you are going to leave your family, your loved ones and community – and not knowing if you'll ever come home again."

These men and women stepped forward 60 years to do what had to be done.

"We can only imagine the courage that these folks demonstrated, stepping up and saying, 'I will serve my country,'" he said. "If it had not been for the bravery and courage of these men and all the others who served in World War II, we would live in a much different country today. So many of the freedoms we enjoy and take for granted would most likely not even exist."

Kruse said every member of the Honor Tour is a hero, and he expressed the community's thanks for their courage and honor.

Following Kruse's remarks, T.S. Hill Middle School students presented each of the 30 men on the tour with a special cap for their journey. The musical ensemble Replica from Sikeston performed a selection of World War II era popular songs.

To close the program the DHS Honors Choir under the direction of MaryRuth Boone sand “Armed Forces – The Pride of America” and Boone and the choir led the entire gathering in singing “God Bless America.”

After the veterans were escorted from the BEC, they gathered their belongs and said farewell to family and friends, they made their way to the charter bus for the first leg of their journey to Washington, D.C.

The Honor Tour will return to Southeast Missouri Sunday evening.

Photo Above: Four members of the Honor Tour during the departure ceremony Friday morning at the Bootheel Event Center, (from left) Lawrence Konzen of Branson, Chet Medler and Joe Hutchason both of Dexter, and Harold Springs of Sikeston.

ShowMe Times Photo Gallery

LAST UPDATED ON APRIL 29TH 2011 BY NEWS

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