

Bay honors fallen on Memorial Day

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It was the living who were uplifted as they remembered the dead Monday in Memorial Day ceremonies at Kent-Forest Lawn Cemetery and the Panama City Garden Club.

"We are here to mourn and at the same time celebrate the lives we have lost," said Tricia English, whose husband, Army Capt. Shawn English, 35, died in Iraq in December 2006.

She said her husband told her two very important things shortly before his death. "Cherish every moment and take care of each other."

Tricia English asked those attending the annual Memorial Day service at the cemetery to look to the care of those who have returned from the war, whether with physical or mental wounds.

"They say there are no unwounded soldiers," Tricia English said. "It's up to us to help those sitting beside us. Reach out and show your appreciation with action."

A steady breeze lifted the American flags forming a half-circle around a veteran's memorial and whisked away the blue musket smoke from a 21-shot volley.

Former Circuit Judge Glenn Hess quoted from Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address as he asked the crowd to honor those who had given their all for their country.

He said he toured Gettysburg recently and saw a wall of photos lining the basement of a museum there. One picture, of three young children in their "Sunday best," seemed out of place among the other grisly photos of carnage.

Hess said the picture was found in the hand of a sergeant who had died sitting against a tree with the picture pressed to his chest.

"He had given that last full measure to them and to us," Hess said.

Hess, a former military helicopter pilot, said his yearlong tour in Vietnam, in which he was wounded and awarded the Bronze Star for valor, was the longest of his life and he didn't believe he would survive it.

He said his unit had a code that they lived by, but which applies to all veterans: "If you are wounded, I will carry you. If you are captured, I will come for you. If you are killed, I will always remember you.

"That is the bond of all who wear the uniform."

A standing room only crowd at the Garden Club was in attendance as Army Spc. Charles A. Jankowski's name was added to a memorial wall on the grounds. Jankowski, 24, was killed in Iraq on March 28.

The Rev. Tom Weller said with Jankowski's death being so recent his family's "anguish is still fresh."

"We cannot fathom the depth of their loss," Weller told those assembled. Jankowski's name "will be added to the wall with the thanks of a grateful nation."