

REFLECTIONS of VVA CHAPTER 421 POW/MIA Ceremony

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By

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As the sun peered through the clouds yielding to a sunny day, the Vietnam Veterans of America Chapter 421 paid homage to those who were Prisoners of War and those still listed as Missing in Action at their annual POW/MIA ceremony at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Park on Manor Road and Martling Ave. in Staten Island.. Dennis Mcloone, Master of Ceremonies, opened the ceremony with the presentation of the Chapter's Honor Guard. As a metronome keeps the beat for musicians, Former Marine Richie Martin's cadence calling kept the Guard's marching tempo. Once the Guard stood in place, Joe Skinner, leader of the Chapter's Color Guard, solemnly marched in the POW/MIA flag as the crowd of about 200 stood at attention rendering a salute to the black flag with the silhouette of a bowed head. The crowd, which included many from the political arena, Diane Hesterhagen, principal of St. Adalbert School along with a group of her students, and Desiree, Richmond County director of Veteran Services, stood patriotically to a beautiful performance of the National anthem by Andrea Botting.

Following closing remarks by the Chapter's president Gene DiGiacomo, Assemblyman Michael Cusick, New York State Senator Diane Savino, Assemblyman Matthew Titone, New York City Councilman Steve Matteo, and Borough President James Oddo, the ceremony moved to its most solemn segment, the Empty Chair Ceremony.

Following the placement of the POW-MIA chair back on the empty chair at a table draped in white table by Korean War veteran George Parsons, Dennis and Mary Mcloone narrate a reminder of the Missing in Action soldier who is not among us. With solemnity, Dennis and Mary perform the Missing Man Table and Honors Ceremony. As always, the ceremony renders utter silence.

Nick Castoro, leader of the Chapter's Honor Guard, presented the crowd with the biographies of Staten Island's two servicemen listed as Missing in Action in Vietnam. As the biographies of Kevin O'Brien and Gerald Crosson were read their photos were ceremoniously uncovered for everyone in the crowd to see, reflect, and remember.

Andrea Botting led the crowd to the singing of God Bless America. Richie Martin once again brought the Honor Guard to attention. One by one the Honor Guard marched out of the gates to the Memorial Park. The ceremony ended and for another year, we remember.