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Centralia College Memorial Day Ceremony

Rodney Saarela, left, welcomes Vernon Barlow, Jr. to the podium during Centralia College's Memorial Day Ceremony on Friday in Centralia. Barlow, who was a sergeant in the U.S. Air Force, was the guest speaker for the ceremony. Barlow is graduating next month from Centralia College with an associates degree in business management.

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A Day to Thank Fallen Veterans; Centralia College Holds Annual Memorial Day Service on Campus By Justyna Tomtas / jtomas@chronline.com | 0 comments

Gun shots rang out across Centralia College's campus on Friday afternoon as the Marine Corps League paid tribute to the veterans who paid the ultimate sacrifice for their country.

In the annual Memorial Day ceremony held at the Veterans Monument on campus, the honor guard and members of both the community and college took a moment of silence to recognize those who have died.

Vernon "Buddy" Barlow, a former Air Force sergeant who will graduate this June with his associate's degree in business management, was the guest speaker at the event.

Barlow enlisted in the Air Force on July 24, 1985, and worked as a crew chief and aircraft mechanic. While stationed at Andersen Air Force Base he attended leadership school and worked in support of Desert Shield and Desert Storm.

After his final enlistment, he left the Air Force on Dec. 1, 1994, and attended Centralia College from September 1995 to March 1996. He later returned in January 2013.

"Since I've been attending this school, I've watched it grow since '95 to today and the way veterans are treated," Barlow said. "I have to say that I'm very proud that I'm going to be graduating from a school that honors and respects veterans."

Barlow said although Memorial Day is an important time to thank veterans, he said it isn't the most important day to do so, reminding the crowd to do their part when they can.

"Memorial Day is a day to thank those veterans, men and women, that have passed before us, that have served and gave all," he said. "... This weekend, while you are celebrating or having your barbecues, or anything else, please raise your glass and toast those fine men and women that have passed before us."

Centralia College President Robert Frost also spoke at the ceremony and reminded everyone of the importance of keeping veterans in mind throughout the year, and not just on Memorial Day and Veterans Day.

"Frankly, people who commit their lives to the service of their country not only deserve our full respect, but they deserve a little bit of our attention those other days of the year, too," Frost said, adding that the college learns from the enrolled veterans. "We grow citizens here, we grow patriots here and it's critical not just to the success of the country in our lifetimes, but it's critical to assuring the future of our democracy."

The Marine Corps League closed the ceremony with a firing party and the performance of Taps, before it retired the colors.