

Veterans pay tribute on Remembrance Day

By Patrick Ygnacio
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Retired Air Force Major William Roberts Jr. displayed a Swastika-embroidered World War II badge in front of guests at the POW/MIA Remembrance ceremony held at the local Veterans of Foreign Wars Post Friday.

"The only thing you've got to remember is, if we had not won, you people would be wearing these as arm bands," Roberts said.

At the time of his capture on July 7, 1944, Roberts had 203 combat hours to his credit. He spent 11 months imprisoned in Poland during WWII, where he said some days were spent in interrogation and others in solitary confinement. Prior to his liberation by the British in 1945, Roberts spent part of his imprisonment marching out of Poland across northern Germany.

Roberts described how he kept his family and his community in mind while being held prisoner.

"You have to rely on your own judgment and memories, and if you had a good upbringing, then you remembered that," Roberts said. "Memories stayed with you."

Roberts said he is thankful whenever he hears a soldier has

been recovered or accounted.

"That gives closure to the whole family," Roberts said. "They know that it's over with. They don't go to bed praying every night that (soldiers) will show up. You can't do that for 40 years without it having a detrimental effect on you. When they get the closure, that makes me feel good."

Members at the Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 3413 in San Marcos honored prisoners of war and those considered missing in action in observance of National POW/MIA Recognition Day. Guest speakers included Roberts and City Councilmember Kim Porterfield, Place 1.

Every third Friday in September is nationally observed as MIA/POW Recognition day. A black flag commemorating POW and MIA soldiers is flown outside federal buildings, military facilities and other public offices across the country.

"On National POW/MIA Recognition Day, we pay tribute to the American men and women who have not returned from the battlefield, and we express profound gratitude to those who returned only after facing unimaginable hardship on our behalf," Porterfield said.

Approximately 88,000 American servicemen are listed as missing or unaccounted for since World War II, according

to the Veterans of Foreign Wars Web site. Members of the Veterans of Foreign Wars work year round in investigative missions to help identify and account for missing soldiers.

Greg Foster, education graduate student, served in Iraq for one year. Both of his grandfathers were prisoners of war during WWII. Foster said he was grateful to attend the ceremony and for the veterans and participants that made the ceremony possible.

"I think there are a lot of wounds of war that aren't physical, that don't heal by the time you get out of a hospital or by the time you get back from overseas," Foster said. "I think our only way to really become whole again is by engaging with our communities."

Foster said he is grateful for the support given to veterans, but more attention is needed on the part of the media to educate people on the sacrifices soldiers make.

"There are people who are 19, 21, 22 years old and they are putting themselves in incredible danger, and we as citizens have an incredible responsibility to them. That's a responsibility that we don't always live up to," Foster said. "The message I would give people is challenge yourself to live up to that responsibility."