

Veteran's Day Remarks 2025. J. Y. Miller

Thank you. I am very pleased to be able to speak here today and I thank the ladies of the DAR for the invitation. I also thank the administration and you, the students, of Fayette high School.

I have spoken at this event in the past and on those occasions, I tried to honor my fellow veterans and to inspire you young people to provide service to our great country. I even mixed in a little bit of humor.

My purpose today is different. The DAR told me what to talk about this morning. I was called here today to honor one particular veteran. A man who should be honored especially on Memorial Day. You know that Veterans Day is a day to honor all veterans, Armed Forces Day is to honor those currently serving, and Memorial Day is to honor those who gave their life in providing their service. Today is not Memorial Day, but it is fitting to honor those veterans every day. They are sometimes referred to as Gold Star Veterans.

So, today I was asked to speak about our brother, Robert Edward Paige. He is truly a brother to everyone in this gym today. For those veterans here, he is a fellow veteran and a brother in service. Some of the veterans sitting here served in combat, Robert is their brother in a special way because of that shared experience.

Robert is the brother of every student here, because he was a Fayette Falcon. He sat where you sit, no doubt wishing the speaker would get on with it, so he could go to lunch.

Robert played football and ran track here at FHS. All of you who have earned an athletic letter share a special kind of brotherhood because of those experiences.

Some of you would call Robert brother because you share a skin color. That, too, is a very valid form of brotherhood.

Also with us today are some with an even closer claim to brotherhood with Robert. Please welcome Terry Paige; Robert's biological brother, Shirley Daniels, Robert's biological sister; Robert's niece, Sandi Burris; and Deloris Paige, Terry's wife. Also, a cousin; Serena Smith.

I am going to share some of Robert's history with you. I should give credit to Tim Jackman, who researched part of what I have here. Some of this is his words. The rest of it , including any errors, is my work.

Robert Edward Paige began his life in Fayette, born February 9, 1947.

He was the sixth of seven children in a loving family. His parents were Mary Francis and George Barnett. He grew up in the close-knit Black community just off Fayette's East Davis Street known as "The Bottoms."

Though the world around it held dangers and even hate, The Bottoms was the sort of unofficial village where all the adults took care of all the children, both caring for their neighbors and keeping the children out of trouble.

There was little violence, and even mischief was limited by the relationships within the Bottoms community.

Robert is remembered as quiet and well-behaved, a young man who would look at his peers and say, "I wouldn't do that if I were you," but then try to help friends whose choices landed them in trouble. He became a member of St. Paul Methodist Church as a child.

Robert attended elementary school at Lincoln School on Hackberry Street, which was the school for Black students in the days of segregation. But things do change, and he and other students from "The Bottoms" attended Fayette High School.

While here, he was on the football and track teams. He also joined the high school ROTC program and even as a teenager developed a passionate desire to serve his country in the military. He is remembered as "a heck of a nice guy." He graduated in the class of 1965.

After graduation from high school, he was employed by the Postal Service in Kansas City, MO. But in those days "The Draft" was a major factor of life for young men, and Robert was drafted. He was inducted into the Army in late 1966.

He wanted to serve his country, but the Vietnam War was raging, and he told people close to him that he did not expect to make it home. Sadly, his intuition proved to be correct.

After basic training and medical training, he was sent to Vietnam in January 1967. He served honorably as a medic, Private First Class, assigned to the 9th Infantry Division.

Medic training is not easy. While combat medics are not doctors, they learn how to care for difficult medical conditions, not just wounds, under very difficult conditions. It takes a smart, brave, dedicated person to complete that training. The soldiers in their units almost universally call them “Doc”.

Robert turned twenty in Vietnam, February 9th of 1967. On the 18th of March, he had been in Vietnam only a few days longer than two months. His unit was on patrol. I don't know if it was his first patrol, but he was still the “new guy”.

That day ,when he was barely 20 years old, would be his last patrol. Posthumously (after his death) he was promoted to Corporal and awarded the Silver Star for valor in combat.

I will read what happened that day from the official U.S. Army Commendation:

“The President of the United States of America, authorized by Act of Congress, takes pride in presenting the Silver Star (Posthumously) to Private First Class Robert Edward Paige, United States Army, for gallantry in action while engaged in military conflict with an armed hostile force in the Republic of Vietnam. Private First Class Paige distinguished himself as a Medic for Company C, 2d Battalion, 47th Infantry Regiment, 9th Infantry Division, on a combat operation in the jungles of Vietnam.

As the unit moved across a clearing in dense jungle, it suddenly came under fierce attack from a numerically superior Viet Cong force armed with Claymore Mines, small arms, and automatic weapons.

Seeing a number of his comrades fall in the initial burst of enemy fire, Private Paige immediately dashed across the bullet-swept battlefield in order to render medical aid to the wounded.

Without regard for personal safety and fully realizing the peril of the situation, Private Paige exposed himself to a torrent of enemy fire as he moved to the injured soldiers and aided in evacuating them to an area of comparative safety.

In an attempt to reach one of the wounded men, Private Paige was hit by a burst of insurgent fire and was mortally wounded. Private Paige's professional aid and personal sacrifice was an inspiration to all and contributed significantly to saving the lives of many. Private First Class Paige's extraordinary heroism while in close combat with a numerically superior Viet Cong force was in keeping with the highest traditions of military service and reflects great credit upon himself, the 9th Infantry Division, and the United States Army.”

I believe that every man or woman who raised their hand and took the oath of enlistment, promising to “defend the constitution against every foe, foreign and domestic and to obey the orders of those appointed above me” is a hero, no matter where or how we served following that. Some, however, like our brother Robert Edward Paige; are heroes of a higher caliber who deserve our lasting admiration and gratitude.

The Silver Star award that Robert received posthumously is the second highest award given by our government for combat service. Only the Medal of Honor is ranked higher.

Robert's body was recovered, and his funeral was held at his childhood church here in Fayette. He is buried in the Fayette City Cemetery. His name is on the Vietnam War Memorial Wall at Panel 16E, Line 106.

PHOTO: Robert's name on the memorial wall

Because of the way names are listed by date of death on that wall, his name is there among others from his unit who died that same day, fellow soldiers remembered together there on that shiny black stone.

But, there are names of fellow soldiers from his unit not listed there, because Robert Paige helped save their lives that day. He was a life saver, not a life taker. A family member reported, ...“He lost his life doing what he always wanted to do and that was to serve his country.”

In the Bible, we can read in John 15 : “Greater love has no one than this, then to lay down one's life for his friends”. Robert unselfishly and heroically did just that.

There are nearly one thousand five hundred citizens of Missouri who gave their lives in Vietnam. Robert was the first, but not the last, from the Fayette area.

PHOTO: Robert's picture and decorations

Here in Fayette, Liberty Park was renamed Robert E. Paige Liberty Park in his honor. The American Legion erected a flag pole and memorial there. Our Howard County Legion Post recently named Robert as an honorary member of our Post. A photo of his name on the Vietnam Wall and his photo with his decorations hangs in our post. The Howard County Legion Post also hopes to assist the school administration in placing a memorial to Robert in the gym lobby.

Robert deserves all these honors and more. But the best way to honor Robert and all veterans is to live our lives with the same dignity, honor, and sense of service that his life teaches us, and to keep his memory alive by never forgetting our brother, our hero - Robert Edward Paige.

If Robert had survived Viet Nam and returned home, he might be sitting here with his brother veterans today, another old man with a veteran's cap. Probably wishing the speaker would get on with it so he could go to lunch. He might have returned to his Post Office job, but I think he would have used his medical training in civilian life.. He might have become an EMT working with the ambulance. Perhaps college on the GI Bill and becoming a nurse or a doctor. I am certain that he would have continued to serve others and his country.

The leading of Prayers in public schools is not common or even permitted any more, but I will ask for your silence while I offer this short prayer. You may respond AMEN, if you wish.

Eternal rest grant unto Robert, O Lord and let perpetual light shine upon him. May he rest in peace. God bless Robert and all veterans and may God bless America. AMEN.

n veterans Memorial

ROBERT E PAIGE

ans Memorial

COMMUNITY

Fayette Soldier
Remembered
During Honor
Flight

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Robert Edward Paige was Fayette's first casualty of the Vietnam War. A member of the Fayette Class of 1965, he was killed in action March 18, 1967, near Binh Long, South Vietnam. His rubbing from the Vietnam Memorial was placed on Panel 16 E, Line 106.

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