

Interact Club of Columbia High School

Response of Edward Pratt on behalf of the Veterans

November 10, 2009

On behalf of the Veterans present this morning, I wish to thank you, the students of Columbia High School for this tribute paid to all veterans; your presence and words are gratefully received. I was particularly struck by the essays and poems read today; they show that you do understand who we are. There are 24.9 million veterans of the United States living today and they represent those who served at the time of World War II, The Korean War, Vietnam (of which I am a veteran) and the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts.

I deliberately did not begin with World War I for I wish to take a moment here to share with you the reason for our gathering at this cemetery and this grave-site today. At the grave marked by the American Flag, lie the remains of Melvin Roads. He was born in 1894 on Electric Avenue just a few blocks away. He attended Columbia High School just like yourselves. Melvin joined the Army after graduation; he became a courier whose task it was to deliver messages to the dispersed troops. He did so on a motorcycle. His first task was actually to bring the word of the cease fire, that the armistice was about to be signed. It was 91 days to the day, November 10th, 1918. Sadly, Private Roads was shot and killed performing his duty of delivering the news of the cease fire.

Throughout the years men and women have chosen to serve their country by wearing a uniform of one of the military services. Untold numbers have died, offering the ultimate sacrifice of their calling. They have done so as all veterans have in order to preserve our freedoms. You may know of a very popular artist from this area, from Western Massachusetts actually, Norman Rockwell. Back in the 1940's he was inspired by a talk given by President Roosevelt who spoke of the "Four Freedoms". I googled those words last evening [yes, even us old guys know of the verb "google"!]. They are Freedom of Speech, Freedom of Worship, Freedom from Want, Freedom from Fear.

The greatest way you students can honor us veterans, is to see that these freedoms continue to be practiced in our own country as well as our neighbors. We pray that you work ever more tirelessly for a more just and peace filled world.