

# REMEMBERING THOSE WE NEVER KNEW



ALEX PORTAL PHOTOS, APORTAL@POSTSTAR.COM

Members of the Fort William Henry Museum Guide staff gave a military salute during the Lake George Battlefield Park Memorial Day Remembrance Ceremony Monday. Lake George Junior-Senior High School Music Director Amy Baker, right, played "taps."

## [Alex Portal](#)

LAKE GEORGE – Dozens gathered at the memorial to four unknown soldiers located in Lake George Battlefield Park Monday to pay respects to all the men and women who have died defending this country.

“They were called Englishmen at the time... but they were Americans,” said Bruce Venter Ph.D., noted historian and Lake George Battlefield Alliance trustee, during the event.

The memorial was erected in 1935 at the reinterment of the remains of four soldiers believed to have died during the French and Indian War on Sept. 8, 1755. Although under British command, the men who fought during the Battle of Lake George were provincial American soldiers fighting for their country.

“It proved that the Americans could stand up and fight French regulars as well as Canadians and Native allies,” Venter added. “We should remember this battle as the proving ground for Americans’ ability to stand up in combat.”

Honoring those who had given their lives in service to our country is a tradition which goes back even before we had officially declared ourselves a sovereign nation.

Venter went on to say that 20 years later, in November 1775, mere months after the colonial forces had struck their first decisive blow against the crown, Robert R. Livingston was sent by the Continental Congress to assist Gen. Phillip Schuyler at Fort Ticonderoga. On his way, Livingston stopped at Fort George, which once stood in the area now known as Lake George Battlefield Park. In a letter back to the congress, Livingston wrote that he “could hardly stir a step with[out] imagining that I walked over the grave of some unfortunate victim to the ambition of princes.”

“That’s what we should venerate, those four men that we know about, and all the other ones who died here at Lake George,” Venter concluded.

It’s a tradition which has continued 250 years later.

Command Sgt. Maj. Robert W. Van Pelt with the United States Army (Ret.) gave the keynote address Monday.

In June 2001, Van Pelt was selected to serve as the state command sergeant major for the New York National Guard, a position he held following the events of 9/11, when, for the first time since World War II, the entire National Guard was called into action in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom.

During his tenure, 32 soldiers died in service of those operations, many of whom were in combat and required Van Pelt to perform honors at their funerals. One of the soldiers was Private First-Class Nathan Brown of South Glens Falls. Brown was killed on Easter Sunday, April 11, 2004, in Samarra, Iraq.

“Part of this responsibility is to go over a check list [of personal effects], item-by-item with the family. I can still remember thinking to myself as I did this, ‘here is what remains of your 21-year-old son,’” Van Pelt recalled with a catch in his throat. “If that doesn’t break your heart, I don’t know what will.”

He ended his address with a reminder, which he said he’d recently seen on social media, that summed up the meaning of the day.

“This [day] is in honor of those who paid in life and blood. Whose moms never saw them again, whose dads wept in private, whose wives raise kids alone, and whose kids only remember them from pictures shown to them when they were young,” Van Pelt said. “This isn’t simply a day off. This is a day to remember that others paid for every free breath you ever get to take.”