

Beacon Hill Byline – By Rep. Mary Rogeness

May 28, 2001

Honoring Those Who Served

May is always the month of Memorial Day, and every year I participate in the Longmeadow and East Longmeadow commemorations of the day. But this year two unique events, a graduation and a dedication, were added to May's schedule. Both honor veterans of the Armed Services, and both are deserving of mention in this Byline column.

I learned of the first event when my office received an invitation from an East Longmeadow veterans' organization. It invited me to a special assembly at East Longmeadow High School. In a ceremony that has taken place at other high schools throughout the nation, the school presented diplomas to town residents, veterans of World War II or Korea, who enlisted before graduating from high school.

On a Friday afternoon amid the full pomp and circumstance (including the playing of "Pomp and Circumstance") of a high school graduation was recreated for the men who missed their own graduations in the 1940s. The commencement address was replaced with words of appreciation from public officials, and the School Committee Chair then presented diplomas to Rollin Beers, Joseph Bouchie, Forest Goodrich, Leo Lodigiani and Carmen Picknally. My congratulations to these men who are now both the newest the oldest East Longmeadow High School graduates, since the school was not established until the 1950s.

The second event was the dedication of the new Agawam Veterans Cemetery. The dedication of the first state-supported veterans cemetery in Massachusetts came about after Edward Squazza, an elderly farmer, donated 65 acres of farmland for its construction. The groundbreaking two years ago was on a dusty field that bore little resemblance to the grassy meadow that will now be a final resting place for as many as 50,000 veterans and their families. Hundreds of veterans, many wearing the caps that identified their service organizations, sat in the sun last Monday morning as Senator Kerry and Congressman Neal joined with other dignitaries to dedicate the grounds.

The first burials took place two days later and included the interment of a Civil War soldier whose remains were moved from an East Longmeadow burial ground. His descendants approved the re-burial after reading that administrators wanted to include soldiers of earlier conflicts.

A note for veterans: Since new cemetery was announced, veterans from around the state have sought approval to be buried in the Agawam cemetery. Applications are available from town veterans' agents or from my office. Approval must come from the military bureaucracy, and it is a good idea to start the process now. If you have served in the military, you know it is not always the most efficient establishment, and you might need to find documentation of long-ago enlistment.

Longmeadow honored its veterans and war casualties as part of the Long Meddowe Days weekend; East Longmeadow paid tribute on Memorial Day. I participated in both services, and each one has special significance because of this year's added ceremonies.