Bravery honored in Hanover

Mount Olivet ceremony pays homage to fallen soldiers.

By TRAVIS LAU   The Evening Sun

A series of cannon shots filled Mount Olivet Cemetery with white smoke, and had car alarms harmonizing with bugles during the playing of "Taps," as thousands turned out Monday morning to celebrate Memorial Day in Hanover.

The sidewalks along Baltimore Street were thick with onlookers as the veterans' groups, servicemen, re-enactors, marching bands, firefighters, dance troupes and Scouts reached their end point at the cemetery.

And during his opening remarks at the ceremony that followed, parade marshal and Allied Veterans Council president Dan Davies noted the large number of people who stood up and removed their hats when the flag was marched past them, down the parade route.

"I think this year we've outdone ourselves with the spectators," said Davies, who served as the master of ceremonies at Mount Olivet.

The crowd at Mount Olivet thinned considerably soon after the ceremony began, as most of the middle- and high-schoolers who joined the Hanover Lancers and the Lyric Band in performing the national anthem left the grounds after their performance ended, some taking their families with them.

Featured speaker U.S. Navy Capt. Michael Sokolowski, who served in Operations Desert Shield, Desert Storm and Iraqi Freedom said he felt humbled to be part of the ceremony.
A lot of people, Sokolowski said, consider Memorial Day as little more than a three-day weekend that starts the summer season of barbecues, picnics and family get-togethers.

The hundreds that turned out at Mount Olivet, many of them in uniform or wearing red, white and blue, represent the other end of the spectrum - those who never forget the holiday is about honoring the soldiers who died while serving.

"They have made the ultimate sacrifice," Sokolowski said of fallen soldiers. "And we as friends, family, citizens and neighbors have gathered here to pay homage to their service and sacrifice."

Mark Evich, who attended the ceremony with **Hanover Boy Scout Troop 103**, said it's important to honor all soldiers - whether retired or on active duty, living or dead. And his troop has made attending the ceremony at Mount Olivet an annual outing.

"The people there really appreciate us coming an honoring their fallen brethren," Mark said, pointing toward a stage platform draped with bunting and lined with service flags.

"It's like paying tribute and homage to fallen soldiers and every veteran," added troop member **Clint Wright**.

Sokolowski noted the casualties that have been suffered in ongoing conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. According to the U.S. Department of Defense, there have been nearly 32,000 U.S. casualties - including 4,404 deaths - in Iraq since 2003 and more than 6,000 casualties - including 1,076 deaths - in Afghanistan since 2001.

Sokolowski said that some Americans don't realize what others go through to provide for everyone their basic rights guaranteed by the Constitution.

"It's imperative to remember, freedom isn't free."

In his Benediction near the close of the ceremony, the Rev. David DeLong of the St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hanover, made reference to the figures Sokolowski recited earlier.

"The numbers that were read here, at this podium, were humbling and chilling," DeLong said.
And DeLong gave thanks to God for people in the Hanover area being able to live in freedom, miles away from the fighting.

Sokolowski in his closing remarks said Memorial Day in itself helps to define our nation because the American people choose to recognize, honor and remember those who died fighting for freedom.
"We are the 'Land of the Free' because of the brave," he said.

It's a fact that Davies, in concluding the ceremony, asked the audience to keep in mind throughout the day.
"Before you eat that first hot dog, take about 30 seconds why you're celebrating today," he said.