

MEMORIAL DAY

FORGING FREEDOM



PHOTOS BY ROD THORNBURG / FOR THE CALIFORNIAN

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Bakersfield National Cemetery tribute honors those who gave their today for our tomorrow

BY CHRISTINE L. PETERSON
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It is the true definition of love.

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The accomplished pilot, who leads eight squadrons with 2,700 members involving 17 complex mission designed series aircraft, served as the keynote speaker Saturday at the Bakersfield National Cemetery Memorial Day Service.

Bell spoke of a principle he holds sacred: agency. He defined it as the belief that every human being has the



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freedom to make choices in their life, the freedom to speak their mind, to worship as they choose, to elect their own leaders and to chart the course of their own destiny.



The Bakersfield Freedom Riders honor the American flag.

And that, he said, is not the natural state of the world, where tyranny and subjugation abound.

So he recognized the women and men, who when asked to surrender their

comfort for the sake of their nation, the United States of America, answered the call. "Having been in the test community for the last

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ROD THORNBURG / FOR THE CALIFORNIAN

U.S. Army veteran Capt. Joe Florencio Acosta recalls the circumstances of being on a Black ops mission during a Memorial Day ceremony at Historic Union Cemetery.

Family sacrifice remembered at Union Cemetery

BY CHRISTINE L. PETERSON
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It was the last can of peaches. U.S. Army veteran Capt. Joe Florencio Acosta was on Black ops, behind enemy lines somewhere outside Vietnam, and it was all the food remaining for five men.

"Little did I know that that night the guy that I shared my spoon and my peaches with I was going to put in a body bag and I was going to carry him around for three days because we don't leave our Rangers behind," Acosta told those gathered at Monday's Memorial Day ceremony at Historic Union Cemetery.

They had to run and burn everything they had, hiding from the enemy. They could not stop, with no sleep for four days and three nights, living off the woods, grabbing what was edible, throwing hand grenades into the water to get fish to eat raw.

Acosta said he has more bullet holes and lead in his body than he cares to share, plus a pacemaker and more, "but here I am, guys. You can't keep a Ranger down."

But for all that he lived through, he gave more credit to his family — his wife of 53 years and two daughters. He does not like to dwell on war, he said, but he did want to share the sacrifices of military families.

He recalled celebrating his 10th marriage anniversary, sitting cross-legged in his living room eating Chinese take-out food, talking with his wife about it being time to re-enlist.

By that time they'd moved 14 times, picking

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Thousand Flags tribute fills The Park at River Walk

BY CHRISTINE L. PETERSON
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The gentle breeze moves across the American flags. The flags ripple, and for a moment the field becomes more than a display. It becomes a reminder that freedom is not free.

Bakersfield Mayor Karen Goh painted that visual with words for those who gathered at noon Saturday at The Park at River Walk for the opening ceremony of Thousand Flags, a tribute now in its 12th year put on for Memorial Day weekend by the Bakersfield Breakfast Rotary Club.

We've heard it said, the mayor

reflected, that "the flag does not fly because the wind blows it. It flies with the last breath of every soldier who died protecting it."

Each flag — a full 1,000 of them carefully placed around the park's pathway and along one of its lakes — represents courage, sacrifice, an American life given to something greater than self, Goh noted. Heroes come from big and small towns. They had families. They had plans for the future. And when the call came, they stood, and now America stands for them, she said.

"May we never allow the sacrifice to fade into history or become lost in routine, just pretty flags," Goh

said. "This is about sacrifice. So today as these flags rise against the Bakersfield sky, we do more than just admire them. We remember. We remember the lives lost. We remember the lives behind this."

That theme — of remembering — was echoed by those who spoke at the opening ceremony. This weekend, several said, isn't about barbecues and extra days to travel. It's much more.

To that end, students of the South High School JROTC carefully raised the American flag, which was followed by the singing of "You're a Grand Old Flag" by 7-year-old

Teagan Farley and "The Star-Spangled Banner" by Alexa Esparza.

Embedded in the speeches of several speakers were hints of history.

Rep. Vince Fong, R-Bakersfield, said he receives many international visitors.

"What makes America special? What makes America different?" they ask.

Fong said our rights were not given by government, but instead by our Creator, as reflected in the county's founding documents. Other countries had kings and queens, even tyrants, who could take away the rights of the people. But in America, the rights are God-given,

he said.

The congressman suggested that people take the time to walk through the Thousand Flags display, go to Bakersfield National Cemetery, the Hillcrest Cemetery's Hill of Valor or to Historic Union Cemetery. In all places, he said, American flags will be seen, marking the gravesites of people who died for their country.

Introduce yourself to Gold Star families — those who have lost a family member who served their country. He said they'll want to hear from you.

Kim Price, from the Bakersfield

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Feds issue environmental review aimed at resuming local oil, gas leasing

BY JOHN COX
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An environmental document the federal government released this week moves the Bureau of Land Management a step closer toward possibly resuming oil and gas leasing in Kern and eight other counties in Central California.

In support of President Donald Trump's "Unleashing American Energy" initiative, the supplemental environmental impact statement responds to litigation challenging the adequacy of two earlier federal assessments.

The review concludes, based on new air quality data, that oil and gas operations contribute less than one-tenth of 1% of the region's air pollutants. It says

wildfires, mobile sources and ag activities pollute more heavily.

Oil and gas development uses only a small fraction of the region's overall water supply, the assessment finds. It says that although impacts on newly listed species are minimal, site-specific reviews and best management practices will be necessary.

The filing of the document has arrived a little less than a year after the federal government launched a process aimed at reopening drilling in the region following the Biden administration's move to close federal lands to new oil and gas leasing.

If the effort to resume leasing succeeds, any expansion of petroleum development in Kern would be administered by the BLM's

Bakersfield office, which oversees about 400,000 acres of federal mineral estate.

Oil and gas production on federal land in California averages between 8% and 10% of the state's production total.

The federal government collects a 12.5% royalty on existing oil and gas leases, raising as much as \$90 million per year. About half the money goes to state government; the rest goes to the U.S. Treasury.

In August 2022, the BLM agreed to halt auctioning off federal leases for oil and gas production in Central California until it completes an environmental review of the effects of the

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