Cheryl Mason stepped to the microphone May 27 and described a fear – palpable and pervasive – shared by military veterans and active service members.

It happens in the line of duty for some, years after leaving the military for others. Then there is a death of spirit, the profound futility of realizing you and your comrades have been forgotten despite your selfless devotion to homeland, family and freedom.

“As a nation, we have to keep our promise that their lives and their service will not be forgotten,” said Mason, the keynote speaker at the annual Memorial Day Program at the National Cemetery of the Alleghenies.

Memory is at the root of memorial, and Mason, who is the national chairwoman of the board of Veterans’ Appeals, reinforced that message to an audience of about 1,000 at the sprawling cemetery in Cecil Township.

Visitors and participants came in all ages, including a number of high school-age groups who enhanced the military aura during the hour-long ceremony. A large number of veterans from various wars sat in the rows of folding chairs, wearing patriotic T-shirts and caps, the hats in many instances detailing the branch and other particulars related to their service.

“Memorial Day is proving to be an especially important date in the nation for those who have fallen in battle and everyone who has served,” Mason said. “Everyone who is buried here has a story, and those lives and stories should not be forgotten.

“We don’t want our veterans to suffer that second death.”

Ronald Hestdalen, director of the cemetery, introduced Mason to the crowd and expressed similar sentiments. “This is the day we remember those who have given the last full measure of devotion,” he said. “America has been blessed with having so many dedicated men and women unlike any other place in the world.”

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Sunday's memorial program attracted a large crowd at the National Cemetery of the Alleghenies in Cecil Township.