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## Cadets honor veterans and FMS founder

By Heather Kays/staff

WAYNESBORO – When you go to a military school, things are all structure, tradition, ceremony and discipline.

But on Veterans Day, the feeling is more than that for students of Fishburne Military School.

“A mass majority of the students are extremely patriotic,” said Tom Tattersall, 17, a Fishburne senior. “It’s a very solemn day for (the) mass majority of the kids in the corps.”

The joint Veterans Day and Founders Day ceremony was moved indoors because of rain Wednesday. But that didn’t detract from the intensity and focus of the students as the band performed – cadets presented arms, listened to speakers, moved in unison, small groups and as individuals – always sharply and with purpose.

“I thought it was very interesting even though my legs were hurting a little bit,” said Christian Palmer, 11, a seventh-grader, who said the firing detail set the ceremony apart from others he had participated in this year.

The school is celebrating its 131st year since professor James A. Fishburne founded the school in 1879. The South was still recovering from the effects of the Civil War and Fishburne, a former student and protégé of Robert E. Lee, (then president of Washington College, now Washington and Lee University), understood the importance of educating the next generation of America’s leaders and opened the school.

People put their hands over their hearts and veterans saluted as the Fishburne Military School band played the national anthem. Bob Hunt, master of ceremonies and senior Army instructor for the past eight years at Fishburne, announced the band would play a medley of service songs in which it is a tradition to stand up during a favorite song. All the veterans in attendance stood up before the first note was played and remained standing for the entirety of the songs.

“I think our kids take this ceremony a whole lot more seriously,” Hunt said. “The mood of the corps – I think the ceremony itself brings it home for them. It’s critical that we keep youth engaged and understanding the sacrifices that are made to keep our freedom.”

The guest speaker, Lt. Col. William J. Coffin, who was born in Malden, Mass., and now is a resident of Staunton, enlisted in the Army in 1983 as a combat engineer. His first duty assignment was with the 12th Engineer Battalion, 8th Infantry Division stationed in Dexheim, Germany. He has served in Operation Desert Shield/Desert Storm and in Haiti in support of Operation Uphold Democracy.



PHOTOS: PAT JARRETT/NEWS LEADER



*The Fishburne Corps of Cadets honored veterans during the 131st Founders Day celebration at Fishburne in Waynesboro. (Pat Jarrett/The News Leader)*

In 2006, Coffin was assigned as the S-3 Officer for the 116th Brigade Combat Team (Stonewall Brigade) stationed in Staunton. In May 2007, he mobilized as the executive officer of the Brigade to Baghdad in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. In June 2009, Coffin was selected to serve as the deputy commander, 116th Brigade Combat Team.

“Our veterans share a legacy of service that crosses generational lines,” Coffin said. “It’s a cause bigger than themselves.”

Coffin encouraged the students to – regardless of whether they decide to join the military – figure out a way to contribute to their community after graduation.

“I encourage you to consider the sacrifice of the veterans who have served,” Coffin said. “Look at and consider what you have done to serve our community.”