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he said. "Today is important, because we choose to honor the living veterans from the greatest generation to the latest generation, but we must honor them with deeds, not just words."

The extraordinary accomplishments of the nation's military means Americans owe veterans an extraordinary debt, Kozak said. "Part of that debt is owed to the military families who have sacrificed so much for their country. We must honor all of those families, and not just the Blue and Gold Star banners."

Traumatic brain injuries and life-altering wounds suffered by many of today's veterans of war "also take an enormous toll on veterans' families," he said. "While veterans are often ordinary people, who accomplish extraordinary things, it often an extraordinary family that supports the ordinary veteran. It is the veterans who have given us this extraordinary country."

Sletwold Hall was decorated with several patriotic items that are part of the W.H. Over Museum's collection, from banners and sheet music of tunes written during World War I, to a collection of letters and other military memorabilia from a World War II veteran from Beresford, and a large American flag that once flew on the mast of the U.S.S. South Dakota.

The oldest flag on display in the room has only 15 stars; the banner from the U.S.S. South Dakota contains 48 stars. Outdoors, on the museum's flagpole, a breeze caught the modern, 50-star U.S. flag as it flew at half-staff to honor those killed recently at Ft. Hood.

"Those stars, no matter how many, and the stripes will always remind us of our hard-won freedom," said Maxine Johnson, president of the W.H. Over Museum council. "They will always remind us of those who fought for us to insure those freedoms."

Johnson told the audience that it is a humbling experience to select items from the museum's collection each year for Veteran's Day.

"Doing this each year helps me to recall how much I need to be grateful for those who have taken it as their duty to protect this country and this wonderful life that we are able to enjoy," she said. "The legacy of all veterans lives on in every freedom we cherish, and our hearts that appreciate peace. To our veterans, we can always say that we are proud of you, America is strong because of you, and we all thank you."

Dennis Bickett, a retired U.S. Army major, was keynote speaker at Wednesday's ceremonies. He is in charge of training and operations for the 153rd Engineer Battalion in Huron.

Bickett, who enlisted in



the South Dakota National Guard when he was 17, received a direct commission in 2000 as an officer in the National Guard, and was activated to serve in Iraq from 2003 to 2005. He received the Gen. Douglas MacArthur Leadership Award in 2006 from Gen. George Casey in a ceremony held at the Pentagon.

He reminded the Vermillion audience that since the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorists' attacks, and the ensuing wars against terror in both Iraq and Afghanistan, the United States is seeing a

new, younger generation of war veterans.

"Many are still in the war zone, serving our country as we speak," he said.

Bickett noted that he has no illusions that what he saw in compares to what many of the veterans at Wednesday's ceremony experienced while at war.

"I'm pretty glad about that," he said. "I was with the 153rd Engineering Battalion headquarters during my deployment, and I didn't even fire my rifle except to make sure that it worked. I was pretty lucky."

from reaching our front door.

"These are men and women who at times have experienced trauma, endured pain and witnessed the worst horrors of man so that we here in the United States can live and work in peace," Bickett said. "Our veterans are the reason our children can live as children without being stripped of their innocence by extremist organizations. Our veterans are the torch-bearers of freedom and democracy. Our veterans are our loved ones who have sworn to protect our nation against all enemies foreign and domestic."

Veteran's Day, he added, is also a time to honor the mothers and fathers, spouses, children and other family members of women and men who are currently serving in the military.

"They all assist our servicemen and women in the execution of their duties," Bickett said. "They do this with their tireless support. They take care of business on the home front so that family members can concentrate on their missions."

He asked his audience to not limit their thoughts of veterans to just one special day a year.

"We need to thank them every day for what they have given us," Bickett said. "They are what makes this country great. We also need to provide support and encouragement for the next generation of veterans."

ABOVE: Leonard Bottolfson plays "Taps" after members of the local Color Guard fired their rifles in salute to veterans at the conclusion of Wednesday's Veteran's Day ceremony in Vermillion. Pictured to the right of Bottolfson are Leo Powell, Ray Hofman and Andy Howe. (Photo by David Lias)

LEFT: Dennis Bickett, a retired U.S. Army major, was keynote speaker at Wednesday's ceremonies. He is in charge of training and operations for the 153rd Engineer Battalion in Huron. Bickett, who enlisted in the South Dakota National Guard when he was 17, received a direct commission in 2000 as an officer in the National Guard, and was activated to serve in Iraq from 2003 to 2005. He received the Gen. Douglas MacArthur Leadership Award in 2006 from Gen. George Casey in a ceremony held at the Pentagon. (Photo by David Lias)

All veterans, no matter their experiences, share something, Bickett said.

"Whether you deploy to the worst place on earth, or function as an administration clerk in a rear area, you answer the call when your nation needed you," he said.

Some veterans, especially those who may not have seen combat, often describe their military experiences with less pride, downplaying the role they played.

"When we enlist in the

military, we are giving of ourselves for the greater good for this fantastic nation and its people," Bickett said. "If in the execution of your mission, you are not deployed to an area where death is imminent doesn't mean you are less of a patriot."

Veterans are men and women who exemplify patriotism, commitment and service. "They are men and women who, ought of love for this great country, offer themselves as shields to keep war

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