

Ceremony honors POWs/MIAs; commemorates 9/11

By Penny Randall
Staff Writer

Lisa Sellers believed that her children would benefit from attending Naval Air Station Meridian's POW/MIA Recognition Ceremony and 9/11 Commemoration so she allowed the two youngsters to miss a couple of hours of school.

"Programs like these are important for the next generation," said Sellers as she looked at her children, Shannon and Wes.

The program was hosted by the NAS Meridian Chapel staff and led by Lt. Cmdr. Allan Ford. He welcomed the audience to the ceremony, which was open to the public, on Sept. 10 in Hangar One of Training Air Wing One.

Meridian Police Department Chaplain John Temple spoke on behalf of the 9/11 portion of the program.

"Sept. 11, 2001, began as any other morning," Temple said. "Most of us had settled into our normal routine. Little did we know the world would change forever before our very eyes. When the dust settled 2,998 had lost their lives, and 6,291 people were injured. The overwhelming majority were innocent individuals from 90 different countries. Today we pause to remember the innocent and the brave who died on Sept. 11 and to renew a commitment that we will never forget."

The events of Sept. 11, 2001, touched us all in some way, including NAS Meridian's Executive Officer Cmdr. Ed Donohoe.

"During these days of remembrance, I'll remember a high school classmate who went down in the towers," Donohoe said. "And how lucky my brother-in-law, a member of New York City's Emergency Services, was to be in Queens that morning doing specialized training, and how

horrible it was for him to spend the next month digging for survivors including his comrades."

Following the presentation of the POW/MIA table ceremony, Cmdr. Donohoe introduced the guest speaker, World War II Prisoner of War Glenn D. Frazier.

"This year's theme is 'Until Every Story Ends.' Today we have a rare occasion and the honor to have with us a gentleman whose captivity story did end," Donohoe said. "He is one of the few World War II POWs still with us."

A native of Alabama, Frazier served in the U.S. Army in the Pacific theatre from July 3, 1941, to Dec. 6, 1945. Frazier spent four months at the U.S. Army Ordinance School Manila, Philippines.

From April 9, 1942, to Sept. 4, 1945, Frazier was a POW of Japan and a survivor of the Bataan Death March. Following World War II, he served in the Army Reserve for six years.

Frazier entertained the audience with his story of first trying to enlist in the U.S. Navy at the age of 16. Frazier's parents would not sign for him to join the Navy thinking it would discourage the young boy from joining the military. He in turn visited the U.S. Army recruiter who believed his was of age and enlisted him.

"Is anyone out there older than 86?" Frazier jokingly asked the audience. "Well then I'm the oldest person here. I'm so glad that I'm able to be up here at my age. But why am I here? I'm here to tell my story of something that happened in our history."

The Bataan Death March was a difficult story for Frazier to share. He walked six days with no water, no food and very little sleep. From time to time, the Japanese would pull Americans out of line to dig huge holes; these became the graves for

the guys who couldn't go on or the ones who were killed for no reason at all, he explained.

"I saw men killed, buried alive," Frazier said. "After days of marching we finally saw a water well. We thought we would finally get water, but instead I saw Americans who had been drowned, and if you made a break for water they would kill you. We lost 3,000 men on the march."

Frazier said the question he often gets is "How did you do it?"

"I tell them that I learned I had to be in control at all times and adjust to each situation as quickly as possible," said Frazier who during his years as a POW was transferred to four different labor camps. During this time, the only food Frazier ate was two small bowls of rice a day – many times with worms in the rice.

During Frazier's closing remarks he told the audience, "Many people have hatred in their hearts for the things that happened. I say get rid of it, and don't suffer any more."

In addition to speaking appearances and book signings, Frazier can often be found at the Battleship USS Alabama telling his story.

Frazier is the author of "Hell's Guest," the autobiographical story of his Bataan Death March experience, and his years as a Japanese POW.

Benny and Vanessa Duett, members of the Military Order of the Purple Heart, Queen City Chapter 803, attended the program with two other members.

"I've read his book and just couldn't put it down," Vanessa Duett said.

Joyce Campbell said she was impressed by Frazier's ability to recount his days of captivity.

"He is very inspiring," Campbell said.