

Take time to Memorialize our heritage

By Bruce A. Love

Memorial Day is a time of remembrance, and a time to honor those who have died in service to our nation. While some may think of the Memorial Day weekend as the official launch of summer, many other Americans will solemnly observe this holiday with tremendous reverence, gratitude, and sorrow – some for the first time. Those who paid the ultimate price while combating the forces threatening the very existence of liberty, have made it possible for future generations of Americans, and citizens from many other lands, to experience freedoms that would not otherwise exist.

It is impossible to fully repay the debt that we owe these courageous men and women who died defending freedom. But, we hold parades, conduct ceremonies, and build monuments in recognition of their service and sacrifice, and we attempt to immortalize their memory and honor their patriotism. In Washington DC, one memorial known as “The Wall,” lists the names of the 58,226 who were killed, or remain missing from the war in Vietnam. Another monument, the “Pool of Remembrance,” honors the 54,269 American lives lost during the Korean War. The hallowed grounds of Arlington Cemetery are the final resting places for nearly 270,000 veterans – some from every war fought throughout America’s history.

Today, nearly 60 years after the end of World War II, a new memorial is being dedicated in our nation’s capital to honor the 16 million who served during World War II, and the millions who supported their efforts from home. The memorial includes a wall of gold stars meant to represent the roughly four hundred thousand Americans who lost their lives during that war in Europe and the South Pacific. Many of the veterans that survived the war are no longer with us to receive this expression of gratitude. Most surviving veterans

of what has been called, “the greatest generation” are now in their eighties and beyond, and their ranks are shrinking by 1100 each day.

Earlier this year, that statistic became personal as my father, Robert Armstrong Love (960th Engineer Aviation Topographic Company), and my uncle, Franklin Reed Fitz (Edson’s Marine Raiders) both past away within weeks of one another. Both proudly and eagerly served their country in the South Pacific as young men during World War II, and both continued to serve their country, their families, and their communities long after leaving military service. Their commitment, loyalty, and profound sense of obligation to this country were not unique, but their individual stories, including what they did after the war, are. So too are the stories of every man and woman who served during that time, and every man, woman, and child who did their part on the home front as the entire nation supported their troops, and the cause of liberty and national security.

This summer, as you gather for picnics, weddings and other family events, make it a point to seek out senior members of the family, particularly those who have served in our Nation’s armed forces, and learn about the stories that are part of your family heritage. As you do, give these special people a chance to remember, and honor those who did not return from combat. By doing so, you honor their memory and preserve the unique contributions of some nearly forgotten American patriots. While you are at it, do the same with every member of your family. In addition to dates and numbers, record (on paper, tape, or video) the stories that are uniquely theirs. Your children, and your children’s children will be grateful that you took the time to preserve and memorialize family history that is now woven into the fabric of America.

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