



WISCONSIN LEGISLATURE

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May Their Sacrifices Not Be in Vain

By State Representative Don Vruwink

As Memorial Day approaches, we remember some of the major events that shaped our nation's history and the sacrifice of our soldiers.

In the American Revolution, the courageous colonial settlers battled the mighty British Army at the Battle of Bunker Hill; the colonials persevered at Valley Forge where they were ill-clothed and undernourished; and the British surrendered at Yorktown, laying down their arms while the colonials and our French allies watched.

It was the Civil War that brought our experiment with democracy to the greatest test. Americans in the North and South believed it would be a short war and one big battle would decide the conflict. That was wishful thinking, as Antietam with its 23,000 casualties and an ambulance train 20 miles long is still the single bloodiest one-day battle in U.S. History.

Gettysburg, where President Lincoln would later dedicate the battlefield, is the overall bloodiest battle site, with 50,000 casualties over three days because of places like Pickett's Charge and Little Round Top.

The United States' entry into World War I was waged to support our British and French allies to bring an end to the "Great War" on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean. It cost 110,000 American lives but 43,000 came from what was dubbed the Spanish Flu and would affect our relationship with the world for the next decade and a half.

World War II stands starkly in our national history, with 40-50 million deaths and one out of every 10 Americans involved in the war, be it by serving in the military, working in factories, or maintaining victory gardens, among other war efforts. The Greatest Generation saw America attacked at Pearl Harbor, witnessed the Holocaust, survived or died through D-Day, and island-hopped in the Pacific. The world breathed a great sigh of relief at the Japanese surrender.

The Korean War, fought from 1950-53, has technically never ended and there are 7,704 American soldiers still unaccounted for as of 2018. More than 36,000 U.S. troops were killed in Korea. The demilitarized zone between North and South Korea is still the most fortified place in the world.

Then there's Vietnam, a war fought by my generation, many of them just 19 years old, who fought by a search-and-destroy strategy and encountered Bouncing Betty bombs and tunnel rats in firefights, resulting in more than 58,000 casualties. It was a war that divided our nation, with unprecedented protests on streets and college campuses.

Our most recent wars, from Operation Desert Shield and Desert Storm to our longest current war in Afghanistan, have brought hardships and thousands of deaths to our military families.

Memorial Day dates to the Civil War, when May 30 was designated the day to place flowers and decorate the graves of those who died. Originally known as Decoration Day, the term Memorial Day was first used in 1882, but did not become commonly used until after World War II. Memorial Day was declared a federal holiday in 1967. In 1968, Memorial Day was moved from May 30th to the last Monday in May.

Memorial Day is much more than a three-day weekend or the start of the summer season. It is a day that gives people a chance to reflect and show gratitude to the men and women who gave their lives in service to their country.

All across my 43rd Assembly District, from Whitewater to Milton to Edgerton to Oregon, the sacrifices by our soldiers will be remembered by the living, who resolve not to let their sacrifice be in vain, but to rise up in their stead and continue the fight for liberty and justice for all.

State Representative Don Vruwink represents parts of Rock, Walworth, Jefferson, and Dane counties. These include the communities of Whitewater, Milton, Edgerton, Footville, the Town of

Janesville, part of the Village of Oregon, and surrounding townships. He can be reached at 608-266-3790, Rep.Vruwink@legis.wisconsin.gov, and P.O. Box 8953, Madison WI 53708.

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