

Moving observance

Congratulations to everyone involved in organizing literally thousands of Memorial Day ceremonies around the country last weekend. Americans may be in disagreement about the current war in Iraq, but there is no disagreement about a love of our nation's soldiers.

Around the country, Americans gathered in community after community to honor and remember those soldiers who paid the ultimate sacrifice for our country.

Locally, Shelby County veterans gathered for their traditional services on the Shelby County Court House lawn. My grandfather, Jack Rotzien, a World War II veteran and former resident of Shelby County, participated in the ceremonial unveiling of a new World War II Memorial in tiny Westville, Indiana. And, of course, last weekend marked the grand opening of the National World War II Memorial in Washington, D.C.

Memorial Day, originally called Decoration Day, is a day of remembrance for those who have died in service to our nation. More than two dozen cities and towns lay claim to being the birthplace of Memorial Day. However, it is generally accepted that the day was first widely observed on May 30, 1868, to commemorate the sacrifices of Civil War soldiers.

The first official proclamation for a day honoring fallen soldiers was issued by General John A. Logan of the Grand Army of the Republic. As a result of Logan's order, his organization of former sailors and soldiers placed flowers on the graves of all Union and Confederate soldiers at Arlington National Cemetery.

The motivation for Gen. Logan's order was clear: he believed we should not and cannot forget the price of freedom. In support of Decoration Day, Logan stated "let no vandalism of avarice or neglect, no ravages of time testify to the present or to the coming generations that we have forgotten as a people the cost of a free and undivided republic."

To me, this spirit is alive and well in modern day America. You see small gestures like the display of crosses honoring Shelby County's fallen soldiers on



**LUKE
MESSER**

the lawn of the courthouse or applause for veterans at public events. For example, I had the opportunity to attend the Indianapolis 500 Festival parade last weekend, and the crowd of tens of thousands stood in unison only two or three times during the entire event — each time to honor veterans and/or current soldiers who were riding in the parade.

Last weekend also marked the beginning of a major tribute honoring America's soldiers — the official grand opening of the National World War II Memorial in Washington. Like many of you, I enjoyed the firsthand account of this ceremony provided in *The Shelbyville News* by Robert Rogers.

The World War II Memorial is the first national memorial dedicated to all who served during the second World War. The memorial is symbolic of the spirit, sacrifice and commitment of the American people to the common defense of the nation and to the broader causes of peace and freedom from tyranny throughout the world. It honors the 16 million who served in the armed forces of the U.S. during World War II, the more than 400,000 who died, and the millions who supported the war effort from home.

The memorial will inspire future generations of Americans, deepening their appreciation of what the World War II generation accomplished in securing freedom and democracy. Our entire way of life hung in the balance during this war. And an entire generation of Americans rose to this call.

Above all, the memorial stands as an important symbol of American national unity, a timeless reminder of the moral strength and awesome power that can flow when a free people are at once united and bonded together in a common and just cause.

Messer represents the 57th District, including most of Shelby County, in the Indiana House.

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