

Memorial Day Message



Last year, The Courier’s Executive Editor, Nancy Doniger, articulated what was on the minds of many in town when she wrote, “I look forward to the day when Eastonites will once again line Center Road, cheering on the marchers and the Helen Keller Middle School Band, and listening to speeches honoring fallen service members — and heroic first responders — in front of Town Hall.”

Indeed, the announcement that the Easton Memorial Day parade would go forward brought joy to many residents, who will partake of the parade fun. But it is the remembrance ceremony which unfailingly lends poignancy as we acknowledge those in our families and our extended American family who gave their lives in our service. They died defending our freedoms and those of other nations as well.

We have lost service men and women in many parts of the world, but those who died in WW II (as well as those who survived it) continue to haunt us. Who will share personal recollections of this war with our children and grandchildren?

“Every day, memories of World War II—its sights and sounds, its terrors and triumphs—disappear,” according to the [National World War II Museum website](#).

“Yielding to the inalterable process of aging, the men and women who fought and won the great conflict are now in their late 80s and 90s. They are dying quickly—according to U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs statistics, 325,574 of the 16 million Americans who served in World War II are alive in 2020.”

In Connecticut, only an estimated 4,395 World War II veterans remain. The Memorial Day holiday has great personal significance to Dave and Lea Sylvestro of Easton. Dave's dad and two uncles were all World War II vets. Their experiences, each serving in different places overseas, brought both fear and pride to their parents, Italian immigrants who spoke very little English.

Lea recalls that their daughter, Casey, was assigned to "interview a vet and then invite him to a breakfast at Barlow. Some 20 years ago, it was not easy for many of her classmates to find a living veteran. She was fortunate to have her grandfather to talk to. He stressed that we should: 'Honor the soldiers and honor the flag.' Most of all, he emphasized that we should 'Never forget.'"

Never forget underscores Lea's current feelings of despair "over the rise of white supremacy and the hate crimes that attend it. 'Never forgetting' means remembering all the horror, fear, and danger of a rogue authoritarian leader. It means remembering the Holocaust and condemning those who deny it. It means remembering all the Jews who died because of Hitler's fanaticism and that of his followers."

Lea continued, "It means remembering what Fascism is and being anti-Fascist. It means remembering and fighting against hatred and distrust deliberately sown for political and power agendas." In summation, "It means remembering, as we honor them, what those soldiers fought and died for: an America that is fair, free, and just for everyone. An America that seeks to right wrongs and do better," she said.

For those who would like a few moments to reflect on the toll WW II took on the families of those who lost loved ones, here's the opening cemetery scene from Steven Spielberg's 1998 film, "Saving Private Ryan."

Dr. Richard Lechtenberg, my neighbor and friend, also shared his insights about Memorial Day. "Memorial Day is a day for remembering, and we have much to remember. We need to check the propane tank, the weather, our time shares, the flight

information, the sales, the traffic, the sporting events, and our vaccination status,” he observed wryly. “Those who have lost loved ones in wars feel the pain every day, not just one day a year, and I believe that is what we should remember.”

On a personal note, writing about almost any subject in Easton yields thoughtful and often stunningly astute observations from residents, such as those shared today.

Whether they resonate universally or not, they provoke deeper dives into subjects we wouldn't necessarily entertain on our own.

Whatever your plans for the day, all of us at the Courier wish you a memorable and meaningful holiday.