



Letters & Science T O D A Y

University of Wisconsin-Madison

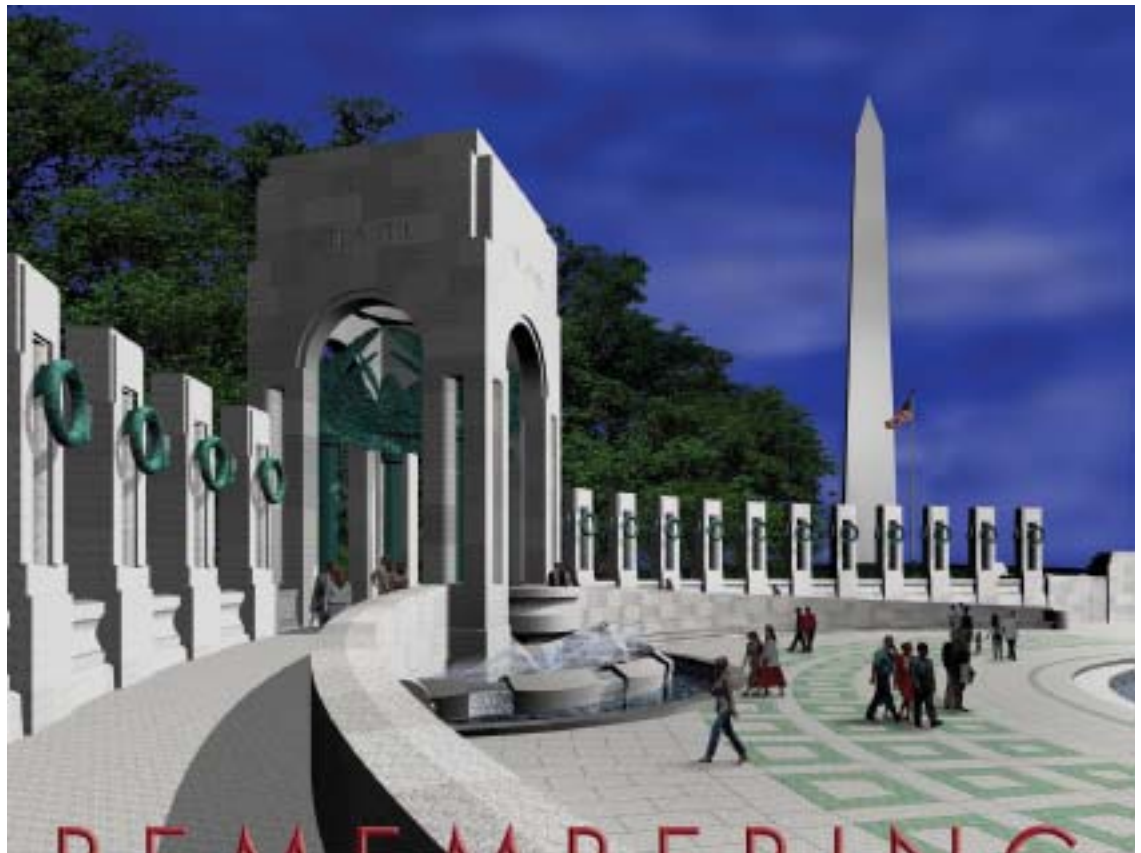
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Dean Gary Sandefur (page 3)



RENDERING BY JOOWAN LEE. IMAGE COURTESY OF NATIONAL WORLD WAR II MEMORIAL

REMEMBERING PRIVATE RYAN

On May 29, 2004, 150,000 people gathered on the Mall in Washington, D.C., for the dedication of the National World War II Memorial. Speakers at the event included President George W. Bush; Senator Bob Dole, who served as the national chairman; and actor Tom Hanks, who was the national spokesman for the World War II Memorial Campaign. The only woman on the program was Congresswoman Marcy Kaptur (BA '68, history) of Toledo, Ohio, who introduced the authorizing legislation to create the memorial and mint coins to help fund it in 1987.

That the 7.4-acre monument was constructed at all has everything to do with Marcy Kaptur's determination that the sacrifices of the World War II generation not be forgotten. The drive to build the memorial began when Roger Durbin, an Ohio mail carrier, approached Kaptur and demanded to know why there was no World War II Memorial in Washington, D.C. There were memorials to the Vietnam and Korean Wars, but the closest thing to a memorial to World War II was the statue of Marines raising the flag at Iwo Jima. Durbin insisted that the latter was a memorial to one battle and one branch of the service, and could not represent the entire war.

That simple exchange launched a campaign that lasted almost two decades, in large part due to Kaptur's personal background and the partnership that she forged with Durbin and his family. "When Roger Durbin came up and asked me why there was no memorial, I was able to hear him. He was quizzing me publicly,

and the combination of my family history and the history that I had learned at the University of Wisconsin ... it all came together at that moment."

Tenacity and perseverance have been hallmarks of Kaptur's life. She was the first member of her Polish-American working-class family to go to college and the only member to graduate, attending UW-Madison on a scholarship. "The people of the Badger State banked on me through a tuition scholarship. I loved every minute there and learned so much. The life I've led gave me the perseverance to keep going even when I was the only one advocating for the memorial, because I believed in the worthiness of the cause. It also was, in some respects, a way of saying thank-you to the people who supported me at the beginning of my education."

Tears baptized the plaza on the day that we dedicated the memorial, and they continue to fall as people visit.

While at Madison, Kaptur was influenced by David Carlisle in political science, and Eric Lampard and Harold Groves in economics. She ultimately found her niche in the history department, however, where she studied with Robert Koehl and Merle Curti, and sat in on lectures by George Mosse and Harvey Goldberg.

Today, she attributes some of her determination
(Continued on page 2)

to build the memorial to her Wisconsin experience. “Dr. Koehl was a great teacher when I was at Madison, and I consulted with him when I started working on the memorial. Were it not for the influence of those professors and courses on World War II, I don’t know that I would have fought as hard to keep it going. I’d have to teach history as I went along, reminding people that this was a memorial to a generation that would never ask for anything for themselves.”

Having grown up with veterans among her extended family also fueled Kaptur’s drive to see the project through. “Two of my uncles had a great influence on me. Anthony Rogowski, who died at age 57, served in the OSS in the China-Burma-India Theatre. He told me war stories and gave me his medals when I was a young girl. His brother Stanley



PHOTO COURTESY OF MARCY KAPTUR

(Above) Congresswoman Kaptur pins a World War II logo pin on Roger Durbin outside of a committee hearing room in April 1990. The pin was created for the WWII Memorial drive from the American Battle Monuments Commission.

(Right) A field of 4,000 sculpted gold stars, the World War II symbol of family sacrifice, are mounted on the Freedom Wall to commemorate the more than 400,000 Americans who gave their lives.

was in the Army Engineering Corps and fought in the Battle of the Bulge. He never talked about the war, but six months before he died, he gave me the scapular that he’d carried into battle with him.”

Memorializing the sacrifices of what newsman Tom Brokaw has called “The Greatest Generation” would seem like a no-brainer, yet the project went through

four distinct stages — all with significant obstacles — before it reached fruition.



RICK LATOFF/AMERICAN BATTLE MONUMENTS COMMISSION

The project began when Kaptur first introduced the authorizing legislation in 1987. It wasn’t until 1993, however, that the project was far enough along to select the site and design. Even then, there were over two dozen public hearings between 1995 and 2000 due to disputes over the design and the memorial’s placement on the Mall. The construction permit was finally issued in 2001 and the formal dedication ceremonies were held in May 2004.

By the time construction began, Kaptur, a Democratic progressive, had forged key alliances on both sides of the aisle. She was a very junior member of Congress when she began her quest, and benefited when Dennis Hastert’s predecessor, John Grottborg (R-IL), marched her into the late Senator Strom Thurmond’s (R-NC) office and demanded to see the senator. She emerged from that meeting with the powerful senator on her side. She also garnered key support from her fellow Buckeye, John Glenn, and from former Senator Bob Dole (R-KS), who co-chaired the National Memorial Committee.

Grassroots veteran’s groups were key to keeping the project alive when it appeared to be faltering, and the memorial received a boost from media coverage of the 50th anniversary of D-Day and popular films such as *Saving Private Ryan*. Success of the project was all but assured when actor Tom Hanks, star of *Saving Private Ryan*, and passionate advocate for the project stepped forward to serve as spokesman.

By May 2001, the memorial had been approved, the funds had been raised, and the site dedicated, but construction had stalled again. On May 15, Marcy Kaptur urged her fellow members of Congress to pass legislation that would permit construction to begin. Reminding her colleagues that it had now taken three times longer to approve the memorial than it did to fight the war, she pleaded, “It is time for America to say ‘thank-you’ to our greatest generation and to make it more than words.”

Kaptur prevailed and the memorial was dedicated almost sixty years after VJ Day, and more than seventeen years after it was first proposed. By then, less than one-quarter of the veterans who fought in that war were alive. Roger Durbin was among those who did not live to see the dream of a memorial come true.

“Tears baptized the plaza on the day that we dedicated the memorial, and they continue to fall as people visit,” Kaptur notes. Some of the visitors are surviving veterans; others are children, grandchildren, and surviving spouses who are there to remember a family member. Other visitors have no direct connection, but want to honor the sacrifices of earlier generations.

Dedicating the memorial was only the beginning of remembrance, however. Just as visitors to The Wall leave mementos of the Vietnam War behind, visitors to the World War II memorial leave medals and deeply personal artifacts marking their connection to the war, and The National Park Service is preserving these materials. These activities are complemented by the Library of Congress’ Veterans History Project that was established under legislation sponsored by Congressman Ron Kind (D-WI) to create audio, visual, documentary, and artifact collections of veterans who served in World War II, Korea, Vietnam, and the Gulf Wars. The project’s initial focus is on gathering oral histories of surviving World War II veterans.

Marcy Kaptur’s work is not done, either. She plans to introduce legislation to create a permanent museum collection based on artifacts and other materials left at the memorial. Inspired in part by the lessons that she learned from Robert Koehl and other UW-Madison professors, she is also working on legislation to mint a new coin to fund a museum that will document the lives of those who fought and build an understanding of the causes of war.

Marcy Kaptur was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives from the 9th Congressional District in Northwest Ohio in 1983. Now in her eleventh term, she is the senior-most Democratic woman in Congress, and is one of only seventy-six women out of 535 members of the 108th Congress. She has been awarded the Veterans of Foreign Wars Americanism Award and is the only woman to receive the Prisoner of War “Barbed Wire” Award for her commitment to veterans’ affairs. In 2002, she received the Ellis Island Medal of Honor in recognition of her work in the U.S. Congress and for her private foundation work through her family’s Anastasia Fund to promote humanitarian efforts in emerging democracies.

*On the Web:
National World War II Memorial
<http://www.wwiimemorial.com>*

*Veterans History Project
<http://www.loc.gov/folklife/vets>*

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