LAND OF THE FREE, BECAUSE OF THE BRAVE

by Debbie Neece, Bartlesville Area History Museum

The word veteran is not to be taken lightly. Veterans are an elite group of people defined "by federal law, moral code and military service as 'ANY, ANY, ANY'… A military veteran is ANY person who served for ANY length of time in ANY military service branch (Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines) and certain Coast Guard personnel operating under the War Dept., Navy Dept. or Dept. of Defense" with honorable discharge.
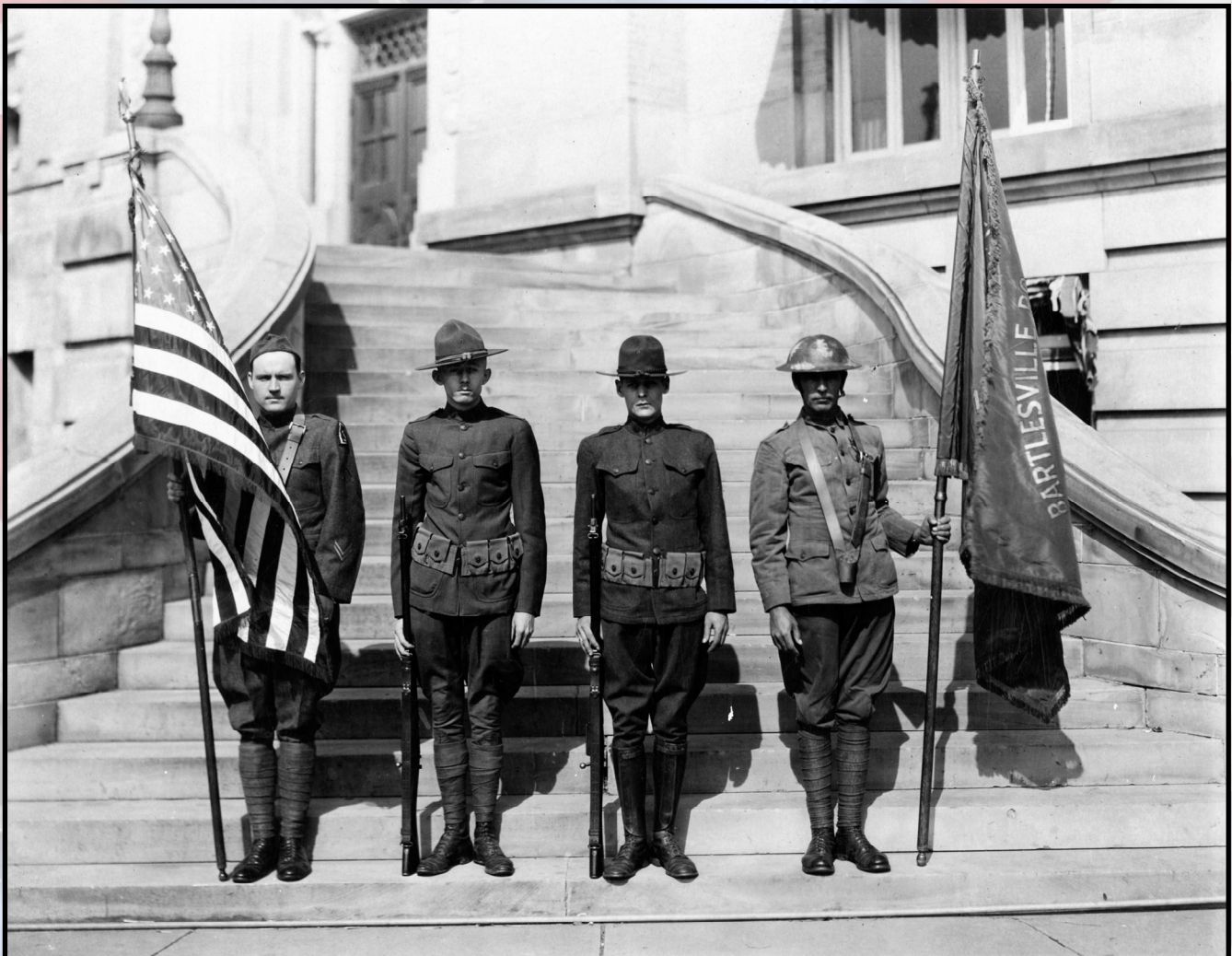
These service personnel did not have a personal gain in the fight…they fought for YOU!

When their families embraced them for what could possibly be their final good bye and watched them walk away to war, the daily uncertainty was mentally, financially and spiritually depleting.

In times of conflict, our dedicated American service personnel left for war as young individuals and some returned broken of mind, body and soul. War changes a person. They cannot un-see the sights, forget the experiences or express the emotions. The world they return to is different and requires difficult adjustment. Some of our veterans struggle daily to suppress the memories and emotions while attempting to return to a life of normalcy, although not the normalcy they experienced before war.

While their families and neighbors have celebrated their return, our veterans have not all been ceremonially recognized, not all have metals pinned upon their chest and not all came home whole. But ALL have embedded patriotism that runs blood deep. They are truly comrades in arms and in peace. They do not seek your appreciation but they DO appreciate your recognition for their sacrifices.

Some our greatest life lessons may be derived from the experiences of others. Area historian, Joe Todd has devoted his retirement to capturing the service of men and women through video interviews and transcribed words that will forever reside at the Bartlesville Area History Museum and the Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library in Abilene, KS. Perhaps this service is as therapeutic for Mr. Todd as it is for the veterans he is interviewing. One thing is for sure, it is through Todd's efforts that the patriotism of Oklahoma heroes is forever etched.

Major American military conflicts have been fought at home and abroad addressing an array of complicated issues with varied rewards. For each dispute, an astounding number of service members forged forward to protect our freedoms and returned as heroes. *Note: The following 2017 statistics were supplied by the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs.*

THE REVOLUTIONARY WAR (1775-1783)
Service Members: 217,000
Casualties: 4,435 Dead, 6,188 Wounded

The American War of Independence was fought against Great Britain in an effort to break free from the heavy taxation imposed upon the 13 Colonies. Although the Declaration of Independence was signed in July of 1776, Great Britain continued to fight against our independence until 1783. Because of common men, who took up arms to fight for freedom, the Revolutionary War brought YOUR Bill of Rights and the United States Constitution which changed governing systems around the world. Each July 4th you are able to celebrate YOUR independence because of these service men.

WAR OF 1812 (1812-1815)
Service Members: 286,730
Casualties: 2,260 Dead, 4,505 Wounded

The United States declared a brief, futile war against Britain in 1812 over maritime policies. This war resulted in no gain for either side except a mutual agreement and a loss of life.

SPANISH–AMERICAN WAR (1846-1848)
Service Members: 78,718
Casualties: 13,283 Dead, 4,152 Wounded

During the coast-to-coast U.S. territorial expansion, war was declared against the Mexican government over the annexation of Texas. The property dispute resulted in 525,000 square miles being ceded to the United States territory, including all or parts of present-day Arizona, California, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, Wyoming and Texas.

AMERICAN CIVIL WAR (1861–1865)
Union Service Members: 2,213,363
Casualties: 364,511 Dead, 281,881 Wounded
Confederate Service Members: 1,050,000
Casualties: 133,821 Dead, 137,000+ Wounded
Total Service Members: 3,263,363
Total Casualties: 498,332 Dead, 418,881+ Wounded

With over 3.2 million total service members involved, the American Civil War was the grandest political and human rights battles ever fought on U.S. soil. Declared one of the deadliest wars in American history, often pitting brother against brother, the loss of life and property shadowed the unfathomable freedoms that resulted.

Civil War Veterans
On the Steps of Bartlesville's First United Methodist Church

SPANISH-AMERICAN WAR (1898)
Service Members: 306,760
Casualties: 2,446 Dead, 1,662 Wounded

Although the Spanish-American War of 1898 was an "onion war" with many layered causes, the tipping point was the sinking of the U.S.S. Maine, the U.S. battleship placed in the Havana Harbor in support of Cuba's struggle for independence. The short lived battle resulted in Spain renouncing all claim to Cuba while Guam, Puerto Rico and the Philippines were ceded to the United States.

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WORLD WAR I (1914-1918)
Service Members: 4,743,991
Casualties: 116,516 Dead, 204,002 Wounded

World War I was a global "arms race" between formed alliances, the Central Powers and the Allied Powers. Although the U.S. did not join the war until April 1917, the loss of life was massive and cost the U.S. an estimated 32 million dollars. The Treaty of Versailles was an agreement of peace signed by the Allied Powers and Germany at *11 a.m. on the 11th day of the 11th month* and thus ended the WWI on November 11, 1918. This day was celebrated as Armistice Day until renamed Veteran's Day in 1954.

96 Soldiers Answering the Call To Duty—World War I Call Out #393—May 25, 1918, Bartlesville, OK

World War I—Transporting Washington County Soldiers By Train to Camp Travis, TX

WORLD WAR II (1939-1945)
Service Members: 16,112,566
Casualties: 405,399 Dead, 670,846 Wounded

What began as a battle between Germany and Poland exploded into a second global military eruption, World War II. Although the war started in 1939 and the U.S. provided significant supply and aid, the U.S. did not engage in the war until the Japanese bombed our fleet in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, on December 7, 1941. The estimates may be low but the National WWII Museum reports that globally, over 60 million battle and civilian deaths occurred during WWII with over 25 million battle wounded service members.

KOREAN WAR (1950-1953)
Service Members: 5,720,000
Casualties: 54,246 Dead, 103,284 Wounded

In a war that seemed to be between South Korea and North Korea, the U.S. went to the aid of South Korea against communist forces. Although the struggles between North Korea and South Korea continue to this day, an armistice was agreed July 27, 1953 ending the war with a stalemate.

VIETNAM WAR (1959-1975)
Service Members: 8,744,000
Casualties: 90,220 Dead, 153,303 Wounded

The Vietnam War was mostly politically motivated. The U.S. became involved in the Vietnam War to support and protect South Vietnam from communism.

GULF WAR (1990-1991)
Service Members: 2,322,000
Casualties: 1,948 Dead, 467 Wounded

President George H.W. Bush engaged our U.S. troops in Operation Desert Storm in an effort to expel Iraqi forces from Kuwait and over throw the government of Saddam Hussein with the support of other international armed forces.

And yet the greatest force we fight is the war on terrorism.

According to an April 2017 Department of Veteran's Affairs report, we have walking among us 120,240 World War II veterans, 172,837 Korean War veterans, 1,544,274 Vietnam War veterans, 2,160,897 Gulf War veterans and 726,238 peacetime veterans. In addition, "we are losing 372 veterans per day."

Please take a moment of prayer for our service personnel in harm's way and for our many broken veterans. If you have the opportunity to be in the presence of one of OUR comrades in peace, please thank them for their service and YOUR freedom.