



In Their Memory

American WWII Orphans Network

www.awon.org

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Largest Gathering of WWII Orphans Expected for Memorial Day Weekend Dedication

*WWII Orphans Who Supported and Raised Funds for Its Creation
Prepare for Dedication*

WASHINGTON, D.C.—Many World War II orphans say they have waited their entire adult lives for a moment that is about a month away—the dedication of the National WWII Memorial. Their eagerness is expected to result in the largest gathering at one time of American WWII orphans May 29–31 in Washington, D.C.

The members of the American WWII Orphans Network (AWON), a national non-profit organization dedicated to locating and registering American WWII orphans, have contributed to the memorial in a number of significant ways.

Orphan Suggested Memorial Design Idea

During the memorial's planning process, AWON Founder Ann Bennett Mix, of Fredericksburg, Va., attended several meetings to speak about the need for the design to include a special honor for the war dead. When Mix saw the initial design included a "sacred space" with a stone coffin to commemorate the dead, she suggested the American Battle Monuments Commission instead consider using stars to represent each one of the soldiers lost to the war so the enormity of the sacrifice could be fully appreciated. The final design does indeed include a "Freedom Wall", a field of 4,000 sculpted gold stars, with each star representing 100 American soldiers who died during the war.

"I attended a meeting when the Board approved the design and thanked the commissioners and the architect for the addition. I think the Freedom Wall is the most moving part of the memorial and we are pleased our fathers and all the war dead are being honored in this way," said Mix.

Mix is the daughter of Sydney Worthington Bennett, A Co. 87th Mt. Inf., 10th Mt. Div., who was shot and killed as he participated in Allied efforts to push the Germans out of Northern Italy in 1945.

AWON Members Raised Thousands of Dollars for Memorial

AWON members were also actively involved with raising money for the memorial's construction. Members collected \$41,530, meaning AWON qualified at the "Protector" level for memorial fundraising from the American Battle Monuments Commission.

Leading the efforts for AWON was member Phyllis "Chickie" Shields Berry of Rathdrum, Idaho. "Raising monies for this long overdue memorial was the best thing we could do to honor the fathers many of us never knew," said Shields Berry. "Hopefully, when future generations visit it years from now, they will want to know more about WWII and how those who fought preserved democracy for the world."

Shields Berry is the daughter of Chief Warrant Officer John Coleman Shields, who served in both WWI and WWII. He died at age 42 after several months of intense fighting in the jungles of New Guinea.

Gathering in Washington

AWON members from across the country are now finalizing plans to be in attendance for the dedication of the National WWII Memorial May 29. More than 500 AWON members and their families are expected to participate in the numerous activities that are planned for the Memorial Day weekend.

"In recent years our nation has begun to pay more homage to those we now refer to as 'The Greatest Generation,'" said AWON Board of Directors President Patricia Gaffney Kindig of Denver. "But we must not forget those who were not able to come home to be a part of 'The Greatest Generation'—those who died or were listed as missing in action during the war. Our goal is to ensure their ultimate sacrifices are also honored during the dedication." Gaffney Kindig's father and father-in-law both went missing in Papua New Guinea in 1944. The remains of Second Lt. George P. Gaffney, Jr. and Major Earl R. Kindig were only recently recovered and both men were given proper burials at Arlington National Cemetery.

Any son or daughter of a serviceman who was killed, listed as missing in action, or later died of injuries sustained during the war, is eligible to join as an Orphan Member of AWON. Other family members are encouraged to join as associate members. Information is available at www.awon.org or 540-310-0750.

