

In their memory...

My father, Private George Roger Connor, an infantryman, was killed on January 4, 1945, in Belgium during the Battle of the Bulge. My wife Sharon's father, Sergeant William Crowley, an airman, died when his B-24 crashed into the sea during a bombing run near Yap Island in the Western Pacific.

One man fought in bitter cold and deep snow, on the ground, in Europe. The other fought in tropical heat, in the air, in the Pacific. My father's body was found and he is at rest in the beautiful American Cemetery in Luxembourg. I was at his grave to honor him at midnight as the millennium turned, as 1999 became 2000. Sharon's father and his crewmates were lost at sea. Sharon journeyed to Yap Island three years ago and chartered a small boat to the approximate location where her father's plane went down. She and her cousin Kathy conducted a memorial service for him and his comrades, placing wreaths in the sea with "I'll Be Seeing You" by Jo Stafford playing in the background.

Pvt Connor and Sgt Crowley were among 410,000 Americans who died in WWII. These 410,000 men who gave all and their comrades, many of whom were wounded, some very severely, deserve to be remembered. And what they did for all of us must never be forgotten. They saved the world from tyranny, fighting and defeating two powerful and determined enemies, Germany and Japan, and doing it at the same time on opposite sides of the globe.

WWII is arguably the most important event of the 20th century. Yet for many Americans, especially the young, it is distant fuzzy history, just dates and events which must be memorized to pass a quiz.

I contrast this fading memory among too many in America to the zeal with which some in Europe recall and celebrate the liberation of their countries. Luxembourg is the one I know best. Their tiny country was invaded by the Germans and the citizens were terrorized and brutalized for four years. When the Americans forced the Germans out, their relief, joy and gratitude were boundless. Then the Germans came back during the Battle of the Bulge and once again, at great cost, the American army pushed them out. Their country was free again and has remained so. Each Memorial Day there are ceremonies at the American Military Cemetery attended by the Grand Duke or his representative. All during the year when our WWII veterans visit Luxembourg, they are feted by members of United States Veterans Friends, Luxembourg (USVFL) - an organization dedicated to greeting and honoring WWII veterans and their families. Each year in June, for an entire week, USVFL sponsors Friendship Week during which celebrations are held all over the country to honor WWII vets and families who come to Luxembourg. Last year, Sharon and I were there. You have to experience it to believe it. School children singing patriotic songs and waving American flags, local bands marching down Main Street playing "When the Saints go Marching In," mayors reading proclamations, food at every turn. It's just amazing.

The people of Luxembourg and other liberated countries in Europe have kept the memory of this great and costly victory alive. Let us do the same in America, and let's start by establishing the "Spirit of '45 Day" on the second Sunday of August.

I want to close by telling you of another organization, the American World War II Orphans Network (AWON), a nationwide group of men and women who lost their fathers in WWII. Sharon and I are members as are some of our friends. Until I learned about and joined AWON, I had never met another person whose father died in WWII, although there are about 183,000 of us according to government records. AWON is a wonderful organization that has brought friendship and solace to me and Sharon and many others. If your father died in WWII or if you know someone in this category, please let them know about AWON, and direct them to our website: www.awon.org.

Roger Connor
American World War II Orphans Network (AWON)

