



## MEMORIAL TO WORLD WAR II VETERANS DEDICATED IN WASHINGTON D.C.

May 31, 2004

*For the estimated 4 million American veterans of World War II still living, the newest Washington, D.C. memorial is a long-awaited and permanent recognition of their sacrifice and success.*

But approximately 12 million WWII veterans -- equivalent to the current populations of New York City and Los Angeles combined -- died before they would have a chance to see the national World War II Memorial, which will be officially dedicated Memorial Day weekend.

The memorial on the National Mall in Washington, D.C. was decades in the planning, and commemorates both the 16 million who served and came home and the more than 400,000 who died on the battlefields of Europe and Asia.

This summer also marks the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of D-Day, the day American, British and other allied soldiers stormed the beaches in Normandy, France -- a military success that marked the beginning of the end of the war against Germany. But nearly six decades after the war ended, the elderly survivors are dying at an alarming rate of 1,056 a day. The memorial actually opened a month earlier than the official dedications this weekend so more veterans would have a chance to see it.

"There are an awful lot of guys who I knew that are gone now, but they would have loved this," said Fred Smith of Rockville, Md. He served in the U.S. Army Air Corps, which later became the Air Force, and visited the memorial after its "soft opening" on April 29.

### **What is it?**

The granite-and-bronze monument encompasses 7.4 acres, about the size of a football field, and is defined by a large oval nearly centered between the Lincoln Memorial and the Washington Monument. It cost about \$172 million to build, almost all of it raised through private contributions.

At its north and south entrances, giant, 43-foot archways represent the Atlantic and Pacific theaters of the war. Inside the oval, there's a wall of gold stars. Each star -- there are 4,000 of them -- represents 100 American deaths.

There are also 56 pillars ringing the monument's "plaza," or central area. These represent all the states and territories at the time of the war, along with the District of Columbia.

More than two-thirds of the monument area is green space, water and fountains. It also includes a circular garden enclosed by a stone wall called the "Circle of Remembrance," which is designed as an area to sit and reflect on the monumental casualties and lasting effects of WWII.

"It is beautiful," said George Lynch, 81, a former Marine who lives near the capital. "To see this memorial after all these years is absolutely marvelous."

### **Why now?**

World War II officially ended on "VJ Day," with the victory over the Japanese on Aug. 15, 1945. That was after the Germans surrendered on May 7 of that year and after the United States dropped two nuclear bombs on Japan, one on Hiroshima on Aug. 6 and the other on Nagasaki on Aug. 9. More than 150,000 Japanese died as a result.

After the war, the U.S. soldiers came home and lived their lives. They had families, went to college; they had jobs, bought houses and changed careers. Many died.

It wasn't until the late '80s, when U.S. Rep. Marcy Kaptur of Ohio was asked at political event by WWII veteran Roger Durbin why a national memorial had not been built, that Congress got behind the idea in earnest. Kaptur sponsored legislation to get the memorial built, but it didn't pass until 1993.

That bill was followed by several court challenges from critics who felt the location of the monument on the National Mall would clutter up the famous and historic expanse between the Lincoln Memorial and the tall, imposing Washington Monument.

Congress passed legislation curtailing the courts' power to stop construction and crews broke ground in 2001. The man who asked the question, "Why isn't there a memorial," was one who didn't get to see it. Roger Durbin died of pancreatic cancer in 2000. His family is expected to attend the ceremony on May 29.

### **The dedication**

Hundreds of thousands of people are expected to be at the dedication ceremony. To coincide with it, the U.S. Postal Service will issue a stamp depicting the monument.

Throughout the summer, more than 80 cultural institutions will participate in a tribute called "America Celebrates the Greatest Generation" that includes more than 140 events all over the country.

In addition, the monument includes the first comprehensive World War II registry, a database of people who served during the war effort, abroad and at home. People can add a name to the registry by visiting [www.wwiimemorial.com](http://www.wwiimemorial.com).

*By Jule Gardner, Online NewsHour*