

Beacon Hill Byline by Mary Rogeness

November 15, 2006

Veterans Day, 2006

Each year East Longmeadow remembers town veterans with its ceremony at 11:00 on November 11th. The American Legion and Italian American Veterans cosponsor a short program at the town's Rotary, which I attended again this year.

Earlier in the week I drove to Monson for the Senior Center's annual luncheon honoring veterans. While there, I talked with two men who joined the Navy as seventeen year-olds during World War II. Then I heard from a man whose first recollection of meeting his father came from seeing a stranger at the door in 1945. He was an infant at the beginning of the war, so his father returned home to a five year old son after being away from home for its duration.

Seeing and talking with those veterans renews my appreciation of their service to all of us every time I see them. And I try year after year to hear more of their stories.

My remarks at both gatherings included an appeal that I will repeat here. If you served in the military, keep your experiences alive by talking with your family about them.

The world is almost emptied of World War I veterans. Longmeadow's last veteran, Albert Newhauser, passed away a just few years ago. Near the end of his life, Albert received a medal from the government of France for his service. But now we can hear stories of those soldiers only if they are recorded in books.

World War II veterans, however, are still very much with us. More than three million American men and women who served are alive today. And many of them live in our town. Korea and Vietnam veterans are more recent, so they are more numerous among us. The Gulf War and today's battles continue to create a history of outstanding service by American warriors.

The veteran in your family could be your parent, your spouse or your child. You may be the veteran yourself. Or you may know of a friend whose service should be shared. Whoever it is, try to start a conversation. Military service in our country is typically provided by citizen soldiers who return to civilian life after completing their commitment, and you may be surprised by the history they have lived.

Earlier this month Judge Sidney Cooley, a longtime resident of Longmeadow, presented documents about his wartime service to the Hatikvah Holocaust Center. This quiet, respected lawyer and retired judge was named military governor of a German town in 1945, and now his mementos and witness are preserved for generations to come.

Now that Veterans Day has come and gone, press reports will diminish; then they will disappear until the next official commemoration on Memorial Day. As I travel around my legislative district, I plan to keep asking questions. If you see me at a gathering, please fill me in on your own years in the service of our country.