



WDVA Secretary Mary Kolar: Veterans Are an Example of Courage and Heroism in Difficult Times

On a November 11 more than a century ago, the guns of the “Great War” fell silent and WWI finally ended. The following year – and every year since – the American people commemorated that momentous day with gratitude and reflections on the bravery and selflessness of our nation’s veterans.

Veterans such as Amelia Ann O’Keefe, born in St. Croix County, who trained as a nurse and volunteered to serve in France during WWI. Or Charles “Chuck” Davis, a veteran who lived in Rothschild before moving into our Veterans Home at King, who during the attack on Pearl Harbor, swam under burning oil slicks to save his shipmates.

We also recognize veterans like John A. Greening, a Koran War veteran from northeast Madison, who overcame health challenges to achieve his lifelong dream of serving in the Air Force and Gary A. Dowe, a Cedarburg native and a machine gunner in the Marines, who enlisted at seventeen and earned two Purple Hearts for his service in Vietnam. Or trailblazers like Marcia Anderson, from Beloit, who became the first African American woman in the United States Army Reserve to attain the rank of major general.

All of our heroes, veterans here in Wisconsin and across the country, each and every person who donned the uniform of a Soldier, Marine, Sailor, Airman or Coast Guardsman, whether they served on the beaches of Europe, in the jungles of Asia, in the deserts of the Middle East, or here at home, wherever they served, they deserve our gratitude, on November 11 and every day.

We are often humbled by the strength of our veterans, by their example of courage and heroism in some of the most difficult circumstances. This Veterans Day, during a year like few others, let us remember that, while Veterans Day is about honoring those who endured the difficulties of war, it is also about the triumph of those veterans, often over long odds and dark days. It is a story about regular people – mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, sons, and daughters – who overcame adversity and won victory through sacrifice, grit, and inexhaustible determination.

Today, during another difficult period of our nation’s history, as we face new and seemingly insurmountable challenges, let the example of those who have served, and those who continue to serve, remind us that loss is not the only thing born of adversity – but also hope, and a better tomorrow. Let our communities draw strength from the example of our veterans and of their spirit of service and sacrifice, of stepping up and meeting challenges head-on, of “doing ones’ part,” and of protecting our neighbors.

I encourage each and every one of you reading this message to reach out to a veteran in your life to hear their story, or listen to the Oral Histories available on the Wisconsin Veterans Museum website. I’m confident you will learn something new and perhaps find inspiration in what you hear.

To the 350,000 veterans in Wisconsin, and to veterans around the country, we thank you.

Mary Kolar is the Secretary of the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs. Secretary Kolar was commissioned in the United States Navy in 1980, served on active duty for 28 years, and retired as a Captain (O-6). As Secretary, she is responsible for advocating for the approximately 350,000 veterans in recognition of their service and sacrifice to our state and nation.