

DEDICATION
OF THE
WORLD WAR I MONUMENT

**WINONA LAKE PARK
WINONA, MINNESOTA**

[November 11, 1999]

Delivered by

MICHAEL J. GALVIN, JR.

Tom Brokaw recently wrote "The Greatest Generation." Brokaw tells the story of the role of the Citizen Soldiers in the United States military during World War II. The book is a tribute to the young Americans who left their homes, farms, shops and factories to answer the call of their Country when the United States was the arsenal of democracy, the last Bastion of the defense of democracy against the Axis Powers - Germany, Italy and Japan. To many this book is the defining description of those Americans who made the ultimate sacrifice in their defense of our Country during World War II.

When I had completed reading this remarkable book, my thoughts turned to stories my father, a Veteran of World War I, related in the 1930s and 40s. Through those discussions, I learned the story of a young 17-year old graduate of Winona High School, who went to work for a bank in Winona in the Spring of 1918. He was immersed in news of that remote struggle for democracy in France, half a world away. He also corresponded with his older brother Dennis, who was already in France as a member of the American Expeditionary Force. Dad made a decision that would influence the balance of his life; he joined the Student Officer Training Corps in the early summer of 1918. The completion of his training was interrupted by the Great Flu Epidemic

and he spent Armistice Day in 1918 (81 years ago today) in the Army Hospital in Omaha, Nebraska and was discharged in December 1918.

His military service was a turning point in his life. It led him to a temporary job as a timekeeper on the railroad, law school, back to Winona and the practice of law, membership in the Winona American Legion Post, volunteer work as the Veterans Service Officer assisting fellow WWI veterans with their claims, and a career as a public official as the Special Municipal Judge for Winona and the State Senator representing Winona.

However, the ceremonies today are not about Mike Galvin, Sr., Legion Post Commander in 1931-1932 and the last living Veteran of World War I to serve as an active member of Post No. 9. Today we pause to recall the names and memories of those Veterans who left their farms, homes and jobs in 1917 and 1918 to serve in the "Great War to End All Wars."

Today we recognize people like Leon J. Wetzel, for whom the Legion Post is named. We recognize men like Earl Neville, for whom the VFW Post is named, and a host of others—Veterans who made the ultimate sacrifice. Particularly we recognize today Dave Christiansen, the last living Veteran of World War I in Winona, who is present today.

Eighty years ago, the Veterans of World War I would have stood shoulder to shoulder throughout this entire Veterans Memorial Park. They were the Veterans of campaigns such as the Battles of Saint-Mihiel; Ypres Salient; Chateau-Thierry, Belleau Wood; and Meuse-Argonne and the survivors of the legendary "Lost Battalion." Today, there is only a handful of World War I Veterans left throughout the entire United States. During the past year, the Government of France recognized the contribution of the American Veterans and awarded the Croix de Guerre to the living Veterans of World War I. It was sadly too late for

many of the men from Winona, who served such as Leon Wetzel and Earl Neville.

What we have learned from this generation and their devotion to duty is a lesson for generations to come.

As a Veteran of the Korean War, I and others present here are members of an honored group - American War Veterans - that are being recognized here today, along with the Veterans of WWI. We are proud to be among Veterans and their supporters.

I'm not suggesting that we Veterans, who are assembled here, - and the many who have gone before us - are a special group. We don't stand above people but we do stand apart because we answered our nation's call for duty no matter what the risk when the times required. Our experiences gave us an extra dimension of what a free country means to people, of what giving of ourselves, and sometimes of our lives, meant in defining the values that go to make-up our great Country.

We learned of courage, of honor and how to accomplish objectives we never thought possible for ourselves. We learned about loneliness, pain, and of the sacrifices our loved ones at home endured in our absence. We learned about duty and responsibility. We learned not to take many things for granted. When you learn of death, you learn of life. And, for some of us, it hastened our search for spirituality that would guide the rest of our lives.

It can be said that the Veterans of World War I, a war that was like no other, who are being honored here today by the dedication of the World War I Monument, set the example for us and future generations. That war was fought by Dave Christiansen here and our fathers - and in some cases - our grandfathers, brothers, uncles, cousins. It was

their values, molded in part by that great historical war, - "The War to End All Wars" - that preceded the generations that came later.

They showed us that courage is overcoming our fears so that we can do what needs to be done. They showed us that we can return from battle, with its physical and mental scars, and readily readjust to happy and productive civilian lives. We of the World War II, Korean, Vietnam, Persian Gulf Wars, and the current and important peace-keeping missions - and our families and friends - both thank and honor them for that today.

We owe a great deal of gratitude to American Legion Post 9 and Veterans of Foreign Wars Post #1287, and their officers and members for today's event. Thank you, the Citizens of Winona for your generosity in creating this Veterans Memorial Park and this Monument to WWI Veterans. Particularly significant is the setting of these Veterans Monuments on the shore of Lake Winona in its tranquil and dignified setting. Monuments such as the wonderful one that is about to be unveiled, are of enormous importance. This is so because memories are short. Patriotism today is not what it was. Respect for the symbol of our nation and all we have fought for - the flag has lessened.

So thank you, Veterans of World War I, for successfully defending freedom, for setting the example for us of how to continue to defend it. And for instilling in all of us here today the pride in a country that, as the world's greatest power, needs to rely on all of that wisdom that you have given us.

**"To you from failing hands we throw the torch;
Be yours to hold it high
If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow in Flanders Fields."**

**- Col. John McCrea
"In Flanders Fields"**

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Afterword

Michael J. Galvin Jr., was a member of the Briggs & Morgan law firm in St. Paul and Minneapolis from 1957 until his death on September 23, 2017, at age eighty-seven. His address is posted here with the permission of the Galvin family.

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