

Rensselaer County

2007 Honor A Veteran Ceremony's



Date of Ceremony

Name of Deceased Veteran

January 8, 2007

Joseph T. Panza

February 12, 2007

William R. O'Keefe, Sr.

March 12, 2007

Francis Desalle Durkee

April 9, 2007

Patrick A. Russo

May 14, 2007

Eric W. Morris

June 11, 2007

Francis Brown

July 9, 2007

Frederick G. Schlegel

August 13, 2007

George Henry Mosher

September 10, 2007

James Westbay

October 9, 2007

Edward F. McDonough

November 13, 2007

Thomas Francis Callahan

December 10, 2007

Richard Otto Gross

Joseph T. Panza

Born in the City of Troy on December 3rd 1926. Joseph T. Panza was one of two children born to Joseph A. and Mary Gully Panza. They were also the proud parents of Joe's sister Elia, who would later be known as Elia J. Gori.

Joseph was educated in the Troy Public School System, attending School 5 and Troy High School. (I believe this morning we are standing in what used to be Troy's School 5). Like many young men during the war years Joe would leave Troy High prior to graduating and enlist in the Armed Forces, in Joe's case the United States Navy.

Joe received his basic training at the United States Navy's Training Station (USNTS) in Sampson, New York and from there had a brief assignment at Newport, Rhode Island before joining the crew of the recently launched battleship, the U.S.S. Missouri.

The Missouri, an Iowa class Battleship which carried the designation BB 63 was designed and built at the New York Navy Yard in Brooklyn, New York.

Sponsored by Miss Margaret Truman, daughter of then Missouri Senator Harry S. Truman, the Missouri would be the last battleship built by the United States. Almost 900 feet long and capable of 33 knots, or about 37 miles per hour, the Missouri carried nine 16 inch guns, and twenty 5 inch guns.

The Missouri would of course become famous as the ship on which the Japanese Surrender was signed on September 2nd, 1945 in Tokyo Harbor.

As a member of the original commissioning crew of the Missouri Seaman Panza would see her through her shake down trials and was on board as she left San Francisco for the Pacific Combat Zone in December of 1944.

Serving as a "screen" or escort as part of the Lexington Carrier Task Force, Joe and the crew of the Missouri would witness the first air strikes against the Japanese Home Islands since the famed Doolittle raid launched from the carrier Hornet in April of 1942.

From there they were off to Iwo Jima where the Missouri's "16 inchers" would provide direct support for the allied invasion of February 1945.

Leaving “Two” the Missouri steamed towards the Japanese mainland, engaging targets along the coast of the Inland Sea of Japan along the way, during which the Missouri splashed four enemy aircraft.

Before downing an additional five Japanese aircraft during the Okinawa campaign, the Missouri herself would be the victim of a suicide plane, or “Kamikazee”, thankfully causing only superficial damage and no casualties.

A few months later, in July and August of 1945, the Missouri would lead the 3rd Fleet in the first strikes at the heart of Japan from within its’ home waters, which a short time later led to allied control of all air and sea approaches to the shores of Japan

Fully expecting to be part of the invasion of Japan, Seaman Panza and his crewmates were pleasantly surprised to hear of the impending Japanese Surrender following the atomic attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

A few months later, on October 16th, 1945, Joe was honorably discharged. For service to his country Joe was awarded the World War II Victory Medal and the American Campaign Medal.

Returning home, Joe went to work for the Troy News Company, where he would continue to work for the next four decades. He would also work as a security guard for St. Peter’s Hospital in Albany.

A member of the Wynantskill American Legion as well as the VFW Post # 3025, Joe was inducted into both the Troy Boys Club and Troy High’s Hall of Fame.

Active in the Son’s of St. Patrick, the Sampson WW II Vets, and an alumnus of the Troy Boys Club Drum and Bugle Corps, Joe’s first love had to be the Troy Elks , where he was an honorary life member, Elk of the Year, and a Past Exalted Ruler.

In case that wasn’t enough, Joe took part in Troy’s Flag Day Celebration every year, and often volunteered to work Bingo at the Albany Veterans Hospital.

Joe had three children with his first wife, the former Mary Greco; two daughters, Colleen and Mary Elizabeth, and a son Joseph. Joe is also survived by four grandchildren, Sarah Phillips, Allison Phillips, Katherine Phillips, and Joseph N. Panza, Jr.

In September of 1994 Joe was married to Roslyn Gordon. Joe and Roslyn would remain together until the time of his death on January 16th, 2006.

It is my distinct honor and pleasure to be here this morning and take part in this celebration of the life and sacrifice of another of our Rensselaer County Hero's, Seaman First Class Joseph T. Panza.

William Robert O'Keefe

Born in the City of Troy on September 27th, 1933, William Robert O'Keefe was one of four O'Keefe boys. Raised in Troy along with brother's James, John, better known as Jack, and Robert, William attended St. Mary's Grade School, Catholic Central High School, Siena, and following his military service, Hudson Valley Community College.

Enlisting in the United States Navy on October 20th, 1953, in the City of Troy, William was trained at the United States Naval Training Center located at Bainbridge, Maryland. Following that training William was assigned to the naval facility in Norfolk, Virginia, known as Naval Station Norfolk, or "NSN".

1953, of course, was the tail end of the conflict taking place on the Korean Peninsula. Officially known as a "Police Action", a term used to avoid the need for an official declaration of war, this conflict in actuality was a civil war, which began in July of 1950 as Chinese backed forces of North Korea invaded their South Korean neighbors. The dividing of the country had occurred as a result of the U.S. and Soviet post WW II occupations.

As in any conflict, for each combatant on the frontlines, there were numerous more providing the support necessary to plan, transport, and supply the troops on the frontlines. In recognition of those performing those vital support duties stateside, Seaman O'Keefe and others maintained military documentation that supported the actions of the military members deployed overseas.

Honorably discharged on October 15, 1955, Seaman O'Keefe was awarded the National Defense Service Medal for service to his country.

Returning home Bill went to work for A. J. Eckert & Company located in the City of Albany as a purchasing agent. Bill would also work for E.W. Thompkins & Company, also in Albany, before opening his own business in the City of Troy in 1963 known as O'Keefe Brothers.. O'Keefe Brothers would go on to be known as O.K. Filters. where Bill, as well as being the founder, would serve as it's president.

Bill was originally married during the time of his military service and had six children, William Jr., Thomas, Michael, Kenneth, Kathryn, and Karen.

Remarried on June 23rd, 1973, William and his wife Cara would raise three children, Michael, Katherine, and Linda. William would additionally be blessed with twenty-one grand-children and one great- grandchild.

Forever active in his community, Bill was a member of the Veterans of Foreign War, a member of the Colony Kiwanis Club, and a life- time member with over forty years of service in the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks in Watervliet.

Bill was a devout Catholic, starting as an altar boy at St. Mary's in Troy, and later in life serving as both a lector and Eucharistic Minister. Upon his retirement Bill became a "snowbird" and relocated to Ormond Beach, Florida, where he would also serve in the capacity of a Eucharistic Minister.

Bill loved to write, "puzzle" over a good crossword, shoot darts, and travel.

A firm believer in the value of love for family and friends, Bill was also a Yankee Fan and history buff, proud of his collection of "Diner" memorabilia.

Another of Rensselaer County's finest, Bill left us too soon on June 23rd, 1973.

It is indeed my distinct honor and pleasure to take part this morning in the remembrance of Seaman William Robert O'Keefe Sr., a veteran of the "Forgotten War", a war and a veteran that we'll here in Rensselaer County endeavor to never forget.

Francis D. Durkee

Born on the 17th day of July in 1935 Francis D. would be one of four sons born to Frank and Margaret Boyle Durkee. Growing up in the city of Troy along with brothers Peter, John, and Thomas, Frank was educated at St. Joseph's Elementary and LaSalle High School.

On July 30th, 1952 Frank left school to enlist in the United States Marine Corps. After basic training at Parris Island in South Carolina Frank spent some time with the Second Marines at Camp Lejeune before being assigned to the "8th and P" in Washington, D.C, where Marines perform a diverse array of duties ranging from light infantry training to ceremonial including presidential support.

Returning to Camp Lejeune to join the 2nd Recon Battalion in 1954 Frank was soon headed overseas to join the Third Marine Division in Okinawa.

Back stateside now Master Gunnery Sergeant Durkee was assigned to a tactical squadron, designation VMF (AW) 531, located at Cherry Point in North Carolina, working in the intelligence unit, known as S2. In November of 1958 Frank took part in the Marine Landing at Lebanon and following that was assigned to Parris Island as a Drill Instructor. In 1962 Master Sergeant Durkee served with the Third Reconnaissance Battalion and in 1964 was transferred to the G-2 Office at the Marine Corps Air Station in El Toro, California.

In 1966 Frank was again sent overseas, this time to the Third Marines Amphibious Force in Viet Nam. Following his tour in Viet Nam Frank was assigned to the Fleet Marine Force Atlantic in Norfolk, Virginia, transferring to the First Marine Division at Camp Pendleton, California in 1971.

In 1974 Frank was to see his third overseas assignment when he was reassigned to the third Marine Division in Okinawa. Returning to Camp Pendleton in 1975 Frank would serve there again in G-2 until his separation from military service in June of '77.

Honorably discharged at that time Master Gunnery Sergeant Durkee received the Navy Achievement Medal w/ Combat "V" and the Good Conduct Medal w/ Eight Awards.

Frank and the former Roslyn Tanenbaum were married on August the 10th in 1966 and together they would raise three sons, David, Phillip, and Eric, as

well as their daughter Joyce. They would be further blessed with their grandson, David.

After serving twenty five years in the Marine Corp Frank was employed by the Northrop Company and then Pinkerton Security in the Antelope Valley of California.

Frank was active in numerous community organizations including the Elks Lodge in Lancaster, California, and the VFW in Rosamond, California. Frank was also a member of the Navy Fleet Reserve and the Marine Corps Intelligence Association.

Predeceased by his loving wife of thirty five years on October 21st, 2001, Frank himself passed away on February 4th, 2003.

It gives me great pleasure to be here this morning as we celebrate the life of a man whose decorated military career is one truly worthy of our note and recognition, Master Gunnery Sergeant Francis Desalle Durkee.

Patrick A. Russo

Born on May 30th, 1927, to Aneillo and Mary Seduccatti Russo, Patrick A. Russo would comprise only 1/13th of the “Russo Brood”. Pat was raised on 4th Street in the City of Troy along with his six brothers and six sisters.

Educated in the Troy School System Pat would go on to attend the new vocational school located in the City of Troy which we know today as Hudson Valley Community College.

Just into his teens Pat took a job with the Arsenal in Watervliet. A short time later on August the 3rd of 1943, the sixteen year old engaged in a little “creative license” if you will, and after rearranging a few numbers on his birth certificate was allowed to enlist in the United States Navy, joining his brother George, a Marine, and his brother Louis, who was serving in the Army.

Patrick completed boot camp, known in those days as “recruit training”, at the Sampson, New York, Naval Training Center. Located in New York States’ “Finger Lakes Region”, Sampson is today considered “Hallowed Ground” having provided the initial training for over three quarters of a million Americans destined to take part in every major battle of WWII.

Upon completing basic training Patrick was off to Little Creek, Virginia, for advanced training in the Armed Guard School located there. Patrick would serve in numerous shore stations from right here in Albany to the Brooklyn Navy Yard. Seaman Russo would also serve on two “Liberty Class” Vessels, the SS Edward Rutledge and the SS Sea Nymph.

Seaman 1st Russo would serve a total of 2 years, 8 months, and 1 day before being honorably discharged at the United States Naval Separation Center at Lido Beach on Long Island.

In light of his distinguished service to his country Seaman First Class Patrick A. Russo was awarded the Asiatic Pacific Campaign Medal, the American Campaign Medal, the European – African – Middle Eastern Campaign Medal w/Bronze Star, the WWII Victory Medal, and a special Commendation by Commander H.B. Herty.

Following his honorable discharge Pat joined the Merchant Marine, serving with another Trojan, Gerald Christiano.

I'm going to take a leap of faith here and assume that we're referring to the Gerald Christiano who later taught at Lansingburgh High School where he was known affectionately as "Mr. Chris" and for many, myself included, was one of the best teachers we'd ever have.

Pat would also work for General Electric where he served as the Shop Steward for Local 301 of the International Union of Electrical Workers.

On November 25th, 1951 Pat married one Clementina DeRenzo and together they would raise three children, a son Pat and two daughters Ann Marie and Phyllis. Today we can add to that four grandchildren, Connor LaLiberte, and Andrea, Melissa, and Brian Mahar, the children of our own sheriff here in Rensselaer County, Jack Mahar, who is married to Pat's daughter Phyllis, and a great-grandchild Olivia Mahar.

Pat was supportive in his community and was active in both the Cub Scouts and the CYO Youth Center in South Troy.

In his spare time Pat loved to tinker around in his work shop, go camping, hunt, and of course squeeze in some quality time with his family.

Pat passed away much too early on June the 10th of 1974 at the age of 47 and is today interned along side his beloved wife Clementina in St. Mary's Cemetery here in Troy.

Somewhere in the "Russo DNA" there must be a marker for public service, evidenced not only by today's honoree, but also in the long and distinguished career of Patrick's son, and my good friend, another Pat by the way, a now retired Troy Police Officer, who today serves as Rensselaer County's Under Sheriff.

It is with a great amount of pleasure that I take part in this ceremony here this morning as we celebrate the life, times, and service to our country, of another Rensselaer County Hero, Seaman First Class Patrick A. Russo.

Eric W. Morris

Eric W. Morris was born in Enumclaw, Washington, on February 9th, 1974 to parents James W. and Bonnie Bolinger Morris. Enumclaw is a picturesque town of about 11,000 residents nestled in the foothills of Mt. Rainer some 45 miles southwest of Seattle. The Morris's also had two daughters, Eric's sisters Tina, and Veronica.

The Morris's would eventually relocate to the City of Troy where Eric would attend Troy Public Schools.

Residing at 843 River Street in Troy for over ten years the Morris's would eventually relocate to the State of Idaho and then on to Sparks, Nevada.

After attending Reed High School in Sparks, Eric enlisted in the United States Army in 1992 at the age of 18. Eric would serve for over nine years being discharged in early 2001.

Returning to Sparks, Nevada, Eric went to work for his good friend Jeff Sawtell at a Northern Nevada hardware supply company. It was during this time as well that Eric married his wife Jolene, and in the process became step-dad to twin daughters Chyna and Chyan.

A proud veteran, newlywed, and father, and like all Americans living in a world that was too soon change forever.

On September 11th, 2001, a terrorist act was perpetrated on America the likes of which had not been seen since Pearl Harbor. All America was outraged, with many of it's citizens displaying patriotism in ways usually reserved for Memorial Day and the Fourth of July. All American's were effected, some more than others, but not many more than Eric Morris.

According to his friend Jeff Sawtell, shortly after the events of 9/11 Eric approached him and said, "I can't let September 11th happen and not do anything about it". Eric's sister Tina recalls him saying to her about his decision to re-enlist, "You know what? I'm not going to tolerate it," (referring to 9/11) I'm going back in."

A month later Eric had re-enlisted.

Assigned to the 1st Battalion's 5th Infantry Regiment based in Ft. Lewis, Washington, Sgt. Morris would serve 17 months in Iraq in defense of "Operation Iraqi Freedom" before returning home.

Upon being redeployed overseas just two months later Eric jokingly said to his wife Jolene, "baby, this is my job."

Arriving back in Iraq on March 7, 2005 Sgt. Morris was assigned to a Stryker Armed Combat Vehicle as a member of a Stryker Brigade Combat Team.

The Stryker is an eight wheeled armored vehicle produced for the U.S. Army by General Dynamics. Designed to combine the capacity for rapid deployment with survivability and tactical mobility, the Stryker resembles what many would expect an Armored Personnel Carrier to look like with the exception of the multi-wheels substituting for the familiar tracks.

It was noted that Eric often raved about the Stryker, one time mentioning that he and his team had ran right over a mine with a slight rocking of the vehicle being the only result. That story would prove to be ironic as well as prophetic.

About six weeks after returning to Iraq Eric called his wife Jolene back home in Ft. Lewis. It was April 28th, 2005 at about 1 o'clock in the afternoon, and Eric ended that call by saying to his wife Jolene, "I love you."

Several hours later an officer knocked on Jolene's door to inform her that Eric and three other members of his "Stryker" Team had been killed when an Improvised Explosive Device or "I.E.D." had been set off near their vehicle, not far from the Iraqi town of Tal Afar.

Sgt. Eric Morris was buried with full military honors at the Mountain View Cemetery in Reno, Nevada on May 7th, 2005. He was the recipient of both the Bronze Star and the Purple Heart.

"I was deeply saddened to hear of the passing of Sgt. Morris, he risked his own life so that others would have the opportunity to experience the liberties that all Americans enjoy. Sadly, this act of bravery cost him his life."

This morning it is my pleasure to add Rensselaer County's words of praise, thanks, and admiration to those above which were taken from remarks made by the Hon. Kenny Guinn, governor of the state of Nevada, the place where Sgt. Morris had eventually called home.

It is with great pride that this morning we officially agree to share with Nevada another of Rensselaer County's Hero's, Sgt. Eric W. Morris.

Francis Brown

It's the early afternoon of June 8th, 1967 in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea. On board the U.S.S. Liberty, a 455 foot, 10,000 ton "intelligence vessel", the mood is relaxed, but far from comfortable.

Not far off the Egyptian and Israeli Coasts, the crew of the Liberty is aware that very nearby men are dying. It's the fourth day of the third Arab-Israeli War, a conflict which will soon come to be known as the Six Day War.

Although the United States is officially neutral, it is well known that Israel at the very least represents the United States best friend in the region, a relationship many would better define as that of "allies".

The weather is clear and sunny, and crewman on the bridge of the Liberty are enjoying a warm 7 knot breeze. Like all American Naval Vessels the Liberty is flying a standard 5 x 8 foot American flag.

Shortly after the noon hour two Israeli Aircraft, their "Star of David" markings clearly visible, circled the Liberty.

A Senior Radio Chief reported to an officer on deck, James Ennes, that they had heard the pilots of the Israeli aircraft correctly identify the Liberty to their headquarters and therefore there was no reason for concern.

A few hours later radar picked up three surface craft approaching the Liberty at a high rate of speed. At almost the same instant another radar report indicated three high performance aircraft closing on the ship from the same direction.

Given the fact that the Liberty had already been "checked out" by Israeli aircraft on numerous occasions nobody was overly concerned by these latest reports.

A few men even climbed up to the signal deck to take some pictures of the approaching aircraft. Suddenly somebody shouted that one of the planes was firing on the Liberty and all over the deck men began dropping.

The air assault continued for the next half hour, and was followed by a torpedo attack launched by the three boats that had been first reported. Forty minutes later it was over.

In just over an hour, as a result of what would be officially recognized as a tragic accident, 34 men were dead, and over 170 injured.

At one point during the attack, after seeing that the American Flag had been shot down, the Quartermaster, along with another crewman, raised an over-sized 7 x 13 foot flag in its' place. A short time later that same Quartermaster, upon seeing the helmsman fall, took the wheel himself, and there he would die.

That Quartermaster is the man we honor here this morning, Francis Brown.

Born in Albany on May 6th, 1947, to parents Wade and Theresa Fortin Brown, Francis moved to the City of Troy at the age of five. The Brown's had five other sons as well: Donald, John, George, Michael, and Daniel.

Francis attended St. Patrick's School and Troy High School. He played Little League and never turned down any other opportunity to play ball either, albeit organized or "sandlot".

He was a member of the Troy Boy's Club where he was known to "own" the pool table, such was he skill level on the "felt".

Francis would join the Navy in 1964 at the tender age of 17. Four years later he was dead.

As recounted earlier Francis fearlessly exposed himself to enemy fire in an effort to maintain a steady course after the helmsman had become incapacitated.

As a result of his courageous actions Quartermaster Third Class Francis Brown was posthumously awarded a Purple Heart and the Navy Cross.

A hero in every sense of the word, the circumstances surrounding Francis Browns' sacrifice are not important. What is important is that Francis acted selflessly in an effort to protect his fellow crew members and in defense of his country.

It is with great honor that I join others here this morning as we pay tribute to another Rensselaer County Hero, Quartermaster Francis Brown.

Frederick G. Schlegel

Frederick G. Schlegel was born in the City of Troy on July 19th, 1915 to parents John and Natalie Greulich Schlegel.

John attended public schools in Troy graduating from Troy High School in 1933. In that Class of '33 John was both the class president and the editor of the school yearbook.

John had a sister Elizabeth and two brothers John and William.

After graduating high school Frederick went to work as a retail floral clerk, a job he left to join the United States Army Air Corp on November 16th of 1942.

Fred was chosen to attend Officers Candidate School eventually attaining the rank of captain.

Although not shipped overseas until the summer of 1945 Captain Schlegel would take part in the invasion and occupation of Okinawa. A part of the 8th Air Forces 559th Air Service Group, Captain Schlegel's 316th Bomb Wing operated off the South Pacific Island of Tinian.

That same island of Tinian was also the home of the 509th Bomb Group, which a few months after Captain Schlegel's arrival would fly the first Atomic Raid in history over the Japanese City of Hiroshima.

Upon the cessation of hostilities at the end of WW II the 316th Bomb Wing would take part in mapping operations over Japan and China.

On the occasion of his official discharge from the service on the 5th of June, 1946 for service to his country Capt. Schlegel was awarded the American Campaign Medal, the Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal, and the WW II Victory Medal.

Following his separation from the service Fred returned to the floral business, eventually becoming the president of Oakwood Flowers Incorporated in Troy. He also worked in sales for the Seagroatt Floral Company in Albany.

On May 2, 1943 Fred married Mary (Mollie) Doyle and together they would raise three daughters; Judith, Jacquelyn, and Carolyn.

They would further be blessed with the arrival of their grandchildren; Aimee Church, and Shawn and Shannon Witbeck, and five great- grandchildren.

Month after month we hear about how much our vets give back to their community and Frederick Schlegel is certainly no exception.

Fred was a lifetime member of Germania Hall in Lansingburgh , a deacon and trustee at the former United Church of Christ, and later an active one of our friends in the Brunswick R.O.U.S.E. or Rensselaer Organizations United for Senior Endeavors.

He enjoyed shuffleboard and was an avid bowler, bowling in both the RRY and Burgh Church Leagues. Fred was also a hunter and fisherman who loved to camp out, spending many summers at Summit Lake.

Upon his retirement Fred and his wife Mollie became winter residents of the Clearwater/Largo area in Florida.

Fred passed away on July 16, 2006 at the age of 90 and is buried in St. Mary's Cemetery here in Troy.

As we do all our veterans we owe a great debt to Fred, and it is my honor and privilege to be here this morning and join his friends, family, and fellow veterans to remember and pay tribute to another of our Rensselaer County Hero's, Capt. Frederick G. Schlegel.

George Henry Mosher

George Henry Mosher was born in the City of Troy on September 19th, 1919 to parents Martin and Helen Russel Mosher. George was raised along with his brother Martin in the city's southern end known appropriately enough as South Troy. George was educated in Troy Public Schools where he attended both School 12 and Troy High School.

Following his schooling George went to work for the Republic Steel Corporation in South Troy and in 1938 married the former Helen Dorothy Sebranski. Helen and George had three daughters, Helen, Georgeanne, and Joyce, who would subsequently produce eleven grandchildren and seven great-grandchildren.

Following the outbreak of WW II George entered the United States Marine Corp and upon the completion of his basic training at Camp LeJeune, North Carolina was assigned to the Marine's Fourth Division. The Fourth Marine Division, or "the Fighting Fourth" as it is known might by some be considered more fortunate than some of its sister divisions. Overseas for just twenty-one months, its operating area was the Central Pacific, and as a result avoided steamy heat, jungles, insects and disease encountered by others in the South Pacific.

In combat for a total of sixty-three days The Fourth, when between operations, was stationed on the beautiful Hawaiian Island of Maui.

They would also be the first Marine Division to return home and be deactivated at the end of the war. All of this may sound like a good deal for Private First Class Mosher and the men of The Fourth, but the reality was much, much, different. No division took part in more violent action than the "Fighting Fourth". The previously mentioned sixty-three days in combat produced more action than many others encountered in much longer jungle and or European Campaigns.

Every one of those sixty-three days was filled with its' own bloody battles, and The Fourth's taking of four bitterly opposed beachheads in less than thirteen months established a record unmatched by any other division.

Yes, they avoided disease, insects, and steamy jungles, but unfortunately when it came to enemy bullets they weren't quite so lucky. The Fourth would

suffer casualty rates higher than any other Marine Division. The four operations in which the division took part were Tinian, Roi Namur, Saipan, and Iwo Jima. In those four operations over 81,000 men of The Fourth Division saw action at least once, generating almost 18,000 casualties, a rate of over 20%. Such figures are used not to boast but to provide testimony to the sacrifice and contribution made by the men of the Fourth in gaining victory in the Pacific.

Of those four operations if one had to pick the worst it would most likely be Iwo Jima. Iwo was an important island and one we had to have. Although entering its final phase, the war in the Pacific was far from over, and we needed bases near the Japanese Home Islands from which to strike the Japanese Mainland.

By capturing the island we would also close down the Japanese air bases which were used to launch strikes against our bombers, strikes which were causing discouragingly high losses. We would not only eliminate that threat, but by replacing their bases with our own, would now be able to provide our B-29's with fighter escorts.

That we were about to invade Iwo Jima was no surprise to the enemy, and following the loss of Saipan had begun a defensive construction campaign designed to make the island impregnable. The Marines knew the battle would be tough, but just how tough would be anybody's guess.

To seize the island the plan was to put nearly three times as many men ashore as there were defenders. On the morning of February 19th, 1945 the Marines saw the island for the first time. In contrast to the Palm trees, white sand beaches, and cane fields that had greeted them at there previous landings they now were looking on an alien landscape of volcanic rock, clay, no trees, and a black beach.

After almost a month of fighting what to this day is considered the greatest battle in Marine Corp history, Iwo was declared secured. It had been twenty-six days and nine hours since the first troops had landed.

Of the islands twenty-two thousand plus Japanese Defenders less than a few hundred were taken prisoner. They had been ordered to fight to the death and most had done so. The Fourth Division alone had killed over 9,000 Japanese while taking only 44 prisoners.

The “Fighting Fourth” had paid a tremendous price as well. Almost half of the twenty thousand men that made up the 4th Marines had become casualties. Of those over 1,800 were killed in action.

On February 26th, 1945, one week after the first marines had gone ashore, Private First Class Mosher himself fell during the battle for Hill 382, which saw some of the fiercest fighting to take place during the battle for Iwo Jima. He was twenty-five years old.

Private First Class George H. Mosher was posthumously awarded the Purple Heart. As a direct result of the sacrifice of Private Mosher and all those who gave their lives on Iwo the allies had taken a giant step forward in the progress of the war.

Like the white crosses which today occupy a small piece of that black beach on Iwo Jima, we here this morning strive to make sure that never forgotten are those who give their lives for their country and the ideals it stands for, hero’s like Rensselaer County’s own Private First Class George H. Mosher.

James Westbay

James Westbay was born on March 28th, 1916 in Palmas, Indiana, to parents James and Marjorie Davis Westbay.

Raised and schooled in Indiana along with his two sisters Lucille and Mabel, James and his family would eventually relocate to Cazenovia, New York which is located in upstate central New York just south of the City of Syracuse.

James attended Albany Business College and following his time there permanently relocated to the City of Troy.

On February 9th, 1942 James became a member of the United States Army at Camp Upton, located in Suffolk County on New York's Long Island. Just three months after completing boot camp James was promoted to sergeant.

Before being shipped overseas now Sergeant Westbay was married to a young lady he had met in Troy, Elizabeth Kelly. James and Elizabeth were married on Christmas Eve in 1942 at St. Patrick's Church in Troy.

Shortly thereafter Sergeant James H. Westbay was transported overseas to the European Theatre. As a Chief of Section in the 434th Armored Field Artillery Battalion, James led a gun crew which was responsible for the maintenance and firing of a 105 MM Gun.

James served throughout Europe including England, France, Belgium, Holland, Luxembourg, and Germany, perhaps most significantly during the Ardennes Campaign.

The Ardennes Campaign, perhaps better known as the Battle of the Bulge, took place from December 16th, 1944 to January 25th of 1945.

Painfully aware that they couldn't win the war the Battle of the Bulge was a German "last-ditch" effort to force a negotiated end to the war, as opposed to an unconditional surrender.

Taking place in the thick forests of the Ardennes Region of Eastern Belgium and Northern Luxembourg, the German goal was to break out and reach the sea, and in the process encircle and entrap four allied armies.

Although successful in achieving total surprise, nowhere did American Forces give ground without a fight, and after three days the determination of

American Troops coupled with the arrival of reinforcements insured that the Germans would fall far short of their goal.

The campaign involved more than one million men: 500,000 Germans, 600,000 Americans, and over 50,000 British.

About 20% of those would eventually be listed as casualties, killed, wounded or captured.

In terms of losses the Battle of the Bulge would be the worst fought by our troops during the entire Second World War.

Fighting in the worst weather the region had seen in a long time the Germans did manage to create a “bulge” in the American Line, but after four weeks of fighting in snow and sub-zero conditions, with heavy losses being suffered on both sides, the “bulge” ceased to exist.

Three months later the war in Europe was over.

On October 29th, 1945 Sergeant James H. Westbay was honorably discharged from the United States Army at Ft. Dix, New Jersey.

Sergeant Westbays’ selfless service to his country was recognized in his being awarded the American Campaign Medal, the European-African-Middle Eastern Campaign Medal, and the Good Conduct Medal.

Returning home to his wife Elizabeth, James, like so many returning veterans, was soon gainfully employed and starting a family.

During his career James was employed by the U.S. Railway Mail Service and also worked as a Tax Auditor for the New York State Tax Bureau.

Elizabeth and James would have two children: a daughter Arleen, and a son James C. Westbay. They were also the proud grandparents of Jo Ellen Brem, and be further blessed with their great-grandchild Ashley Brem.

Often traveling to Chicago on business James attended many a White Sox game, but his real love was for his Atlanta Braves.

Not happy just to watch, James played baseball for many years, and also loved to swim.

James also loved to travel, but when not able to “hit the road,” could usually be found in the garden, in the kitchen cooking what he had grown, or perhaps just “holed up” with a good “read”.

James was a long time member of the Troy Elks, but if asked to choose one favorite past- time, his would undoubtedly be spending time with his family.

James passed away on April 28th, 2006 at the age of 90 and today rests next to his best friend and companion of over 60 years, his beloved wife Elizabeth.

We owe Sergeant Westbay and all our WW II Veterans for the freedoms we enjoy today, and it is with a great amount of pride that I take part in this mornings recognition of another of our Rensselaer County Hero’s , Sergeant James H. Westbay.

Edward F. McDonough

Edward F. McDonough was born in the City of Troy on December 1st, 1932 to parents Edward and Esther Minehan McDonough. Growing up in Troy Ed attended Troy Public School #17 and Catholic Central High School. After graduating from Catholic High Ed was off to college attending both Springfield in Massachusetts as well as Siena.

Ed entered in to the United States Army in July of 1953, the same month that saw the last ground combat of the Korean War and in which the United States, China, and North Korea would later sign an armistice agreement. Although indeed ending the current conflict that armistice agreement would fall far short of establishing a permanent peace. As a matter of fact to this day the countries of North and South Korea have yet to sign a peace treaty, although in 1991 the two did sign a “non-aggression pact”.

Private McDonough was entering into an army which was transitioning from a hot or shooting war to a cold war. He was stationed at Fort Carson in Colorado, and at Fort Carson served with a gentleman who would later distinguish himself not only as a major league baseball player, but perhaps more importantly as one it’s premier managers, the New York Yankees’ Billie Martin.

Upon completion of his active service Ed was transferred to the United States Army Reserve where he would eventually complete eight years of service. Following his Honorable Discharge Private First Class McDonough was awarded the National Defense Service Medal.

Ed was married to the former and future Marion McDonough on the 25th day of November in 1961. You can do that when your bride’s maiden name is the same as your own. According to Ed Jr. they were no relation.....he thinks.

An only child himself, Ed and Marions’ union would be blessed with three children, Edward, Susan, and Joanne. They would also become proud grandparents of Rachael, Tyler, Avery, Owen, Finley, and Teagan.

Immediately after returning from the service Ed went to work in the insurance business but the position which would define his career was the one he would later take as the New York State Assembly’s Director of Operations.

Active in politics, Ed, destined to become the state’s 2nd longest serving Democrat Chairman, used his position as the Rensselaer County Democrat “Chair” to help hundreds, more likely thousands of people! Some, of course,

would establish their own political careers with the help of Chairman McDonough, while many others would be helped by Ed in finding a way to make a living both in the public and private sectors. Suffice it to say that if all those Ed McDonough had helped over the years were with us here this morning these chambers would be bursting at the seams!

As a matter of fact it was through another one of Ed's accomplishments that he was able to be of great help to me personally. In 1987 I was the Superintendent of Buildings here in Rensselaer County and was desirous of obtaining a position which had recently become vacant at Hudson Valley Community College. Ed McDonough, who at that time was the Chairman of the college's Board of Trustees, signed off on my provisional appointment with the caveat that I'd have to take a Civil Service Exam and score high enough to be permanently appointed.

It was only through my leaving the employ of Rensselaer County that I was able to run for the legislature, so I guess I have Ed McDonough to thank for not just my job at the college but indeed my political career as well, probably not something he bragged about much.

Seriously speaking, my personal experience is simply indicative of how many lives Ed McDonough touched and indeed had a direct and positive impact on.

Aside from his political activities Ed was involved in many civil and social organizations such as the Knights of Columbus, the Troy C.Y.O. where he enjoyed coaching, and the St. Paul's basketball squad. Coach McDonough also "skippered" a team in the Armory Little League.

Believe it or not Ed once in awhile did have some "down" time and he could usually be found either on the golf course or at his second home in Lake George .

In the fall Ed would always find a way to root for his Giants while at the same time co-coordinating all the different political campaigns going on throughout the county.

In recognition of his fore mentioned long time service to HVCC, the college's new field house was named in his honor in 1991.

To this day the Edward F. McDonough Health, Physical Education, and Recreation Complex remains one of the main focal points of Hudson Valley's Campus.

Ed McDonough died ten years ago today on October 10th, 1997, leaving behind not just a grieving family but indeed a grieving community.

It gives me great honor and pleasure to be here this morning as we celebrate and recognize Edward F. McDonough, a Rensselaer County resident who not only served his country, but who came home and made a career of serving his community and helping others.

Thomas Francis Callahan

Thomas Francis Callahan was born in the Village of Green Island on August 12th, 1897. At that time Thomas's parents John and Mary Delaney Waters Callahan owned and operated a "saloon" located at Arch and James Streets in Green Island.

A few years later, around the turn of the century, Tom's parents moved the family consisting of Tom, his two sisters Marian and Sara, and brothers John, Daniel, and Joseph, to #16 Hutton Street in the City of Troy.

Growing up in Troy Tom attended St. Peter's Elementary School but due to illness in the family would along with his brothers spend a short time at the Hillside Orphanage, also located in Troy. The Hillside Orphanage was run by the same Brothers responsible for operating the LaSalle Military Institute. Like so many of that era Thomas would not finish school, leaving in his teens when given an opportunity to join the Boilermaker's Apprentice Program at the Watervliet Arsenal. By the way, the Watervliet Arsenal at that time was already some 100 years old having opened in 1813 to supply arms for the "Second War of Independence" better known as the War of 1812.

On June 17th of 1917 at the age of 19 Thomas joined the United States Army. Although listed as entering the service at the National Guard Armory in Schenectady the actual place of enlistment was more likely the Watervliet Arsenal. Private Callahan was assigned to Company C of the 105th Infantry Regiment, attached to the 53rd Brigade of the New York Army National Guard's 27th Division. Thomas and the 27th shipped out of Newport News, Virginia as part of the American Expeditionary Force arriving in France in May of 1918.

The 27th Division joined the 30th as being the only two American Units to spend their entire time overseas serving under British Command.

A few years before, on August 29th of 1916, Paul von Hindenburg became Chief of Staff of the German Army. Hindenburg and his quartermaster general, Eric von Ludendorff, decided to build a system of German Defense Fortifications behind the central and northern portions of the Western Front. Constructed between the northern coast and Verdun, each section would have its own system of mutually supporting strong points backed up with barbed wire, trench works, and artillery. Following the failure of the Spring Offensive the German Army retreated to this system of defense works now known as the Hindenburg Line. From that point on Private Callahan and the men of the Expeditionary Forces would be fighting to gain control of these defenses, finally realizing success in

October of 1918. At that time the German's Third Supreme Command recognized that the war was lost and handed over power to Max von Baden and the Reichstag. The actual battle for the Hindenburg Line would take place in the last days of September, 1918.

The initial attack was made by Private Callahan's 27th Division as well as the American 30th. After bloody, horrific, fighting at places such as the LaSelle River and St. Quentin Canal, often involving gas attacks, the Allied Forces which were made up of American, British, French, and Australians were successful in shattering and clearing the entire length of the Hindenburg Line. Early in November of 1918 the Germans unconditionally surrendered and the Great War was over.

Private Callahan and the men of the 27th were singled out for recognition of their actions by many including the American Army's Commander in Chief in Europe General John Joseph "Black Jack" Pershing.

The First World War, perhaps best described as one fought with modern weapons but outdated tactics, would see over 30,000,000 casualties.

Thomas Callahan was honorably discharged on April 8th, 1919 at Camp Upton, located on New York's Long Island. For his Distinguished Service to his country Private Callahan received an Honorable Discharge Lapel Pin, the World War I Victory Medal, and the New York State World War I Service Medal.

After returning home Thomas was often considered remote, withdrawn, and detached, but keep in mind that in those days the term "post traumatic distress" didn't even exist yet. Years later of course combat veterans would exhibit such symptoms as a result of experiences no where near as severe as those experienced by Thomas Callahan and other WWI Veterans.

Despite these difficulties Thomas would exhibit the "spit and polish" traits and bearing of a military man the rest his life.

Before Thomas began to suffer ill health he worked for a time at the Frears Department Store in Troy. Never married Thomas would spend the rest of his life living with his mother in a two family home on Hoosick Street owned by his brother. He was a member of the Noble-Callahan Post, the American Legion, the O'Brien-Baker Post, and the 27th Division Association. He was an avid baseball fan his entire life.

Some of our WWI Veterans never came home, others returned physically disabled, and still others like Thomas seemed to leave a piece of themselves on the gas poisoned battlefields of the Western Front.

Thomas Callahan left us on October 11th, 1958 and is today interned in St. Peter's Cemetery in Troy.

It is with great pride and pleasure that I take part in this ceremony today which will serve as a reminder to all of the service and sacrifice of Private Thomas Francis Callahan, a true American Hero.

Richard Otto Gross

Richard Otto Gross was born in the City of Troy on August 9th, 1942 to parents Frederick and Philomena Paul Gross.

Raised in Troy along with his brother Robert, Richard attended public schools in the city including School #16 and Troy High.

In 1959 at the age of 19 Richard enlisted in the United States Air Force at the Air Force Recruitment Center located in the City of Albany.

In 1959 the Air Force, then only 12 years old, had assumed a crucial role in America's Defense. Under the bold leadership of Gen. Curtis LeMay, the Air Force's Strategic Air Command, or SAC as it was better known, had become the preeminent instrument of our Defense Strategy.

This strategy, which required SAC to be on continuous alert, required an immense amount of support. Central to that support was a constant need for trained pilots, and it was as a part of that mission that Airman Gross found himself.

Richard was assigned to Webb Air Force Base in Texas, the home of the 78th Flying Training Wing. Located just outside the City of Big Spring, Texas, Webb Air Force Base would supply over 9,000 trained pilots between the years of 1951 and 1969.

That area today serves as a general aviation airport for the City of Big Spring Texas, as well as playing host to number of federal prisons.

Airman 2nd Class Gross was honorably discharged on December 6th of 1963 and was honored with a Good Conduct Medal.

Returning home Richard went to work at Ford Motor Company's Green Island Plant where he would work for over 25 years until the plant closed in 1989.

On November 6th, 1965 Richard married the former Nancy A. Williams. Together they would raise a daughter Patricia and a son Paul. They would be further blessed with four grandchildren, Paige, Lauren, Ryan, and Angela.

Like so many of our veterans, Richard's service to community and country didn't end with military service.

He served on the Board of Directors for the Troy Patriots and had been honored with induction into the Pop Warner Hall of Fame.

Richard served on the original committee which oversaw construction of the Rensselaer Park Elementary School in Lansingburgh. He was also a member of the Troy Elks and the United Auto Workers Local 930.

Richard enjoyed a round of golf and was a member of the “Over 30” Baseball League. He also looked forward every year to that last Saturday in February when he got together with old friends at the annual “Friends of 112th Street” Banquet.

Richard’s spiritual life revolved around St. Patrick’s Church on 6th Avenue in Troy where in addition to being a communicant, he served as a Eucharistic Minister, a Religious Education Instructor, and was a member of the parish council.

Richard passed away much too early on New Years Day in 1992 and is buried in St. Mary’s Cemetery in Troy.

It gives me great pleasure to be here this morning as we remember and honor another of Rensselaer County’s Hero’s, Airman Second Class Richard Otto Gross.