

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-1904

August 11, 2013

Dear Veterans, Families, and Friends:

On August 14, 1945, World War II came to an end. The great victory our armed forces had achieved with courage and sacrifice was greeted throughout America and around the world with joyous celebration and solemn reflection.

More than seven decades later, that “Spirit of ‘45” remains strong. The national effort, by those in uniform and by those on the home front, that defeated the forces of aggression, brought freedom to subjugated nations, and ended the horrors of the Holocaust, provides a model of unity and commitment that inspires us today and will for generations to come.

In 2010, I was honored to sponsor a Senate Resolution supporting the observance of “Spirit of ‘45 Day.” It is with both sadness and gratitude that we dedicate the 2013 observance to two co-sponsors of that Resolution, Senator Daniel Inouye and Senator Frank Lautenberg. They served freedom’s cause with valor in World War II and they served our nation with distinction in the United States Senate.

The spirit we celebrate today goes beyond courage in battle and support at home. It includes America’s ongoing commitment to assist nations shattered by conflict and to advance the cause of liberty and peace around the world. It describes the civic engagement, volunteerism, and service to community and country that is the hallmark of the World War II generation.

I am fortunate to be a daughter of that generation. One of my earliest childhood memories is going with my father to the Memorial Day parade in our hometown of Caribou, Maine. He hoisted me high above his head and from the best vantage point along the route – my father’s shoulders – I saw hats go off and hands go over hearts as Caribou paid its respects to our flag and honored our veterans. Some Memorial Days, my father would wear his Army jacket to the parade. As a child, I thought it was just an old jacket. Only as an adult did I learn the price he had paid for it.

My father Donald Collins enlisted in the Reserve Corps as a college freshman in November of 1943 and was called to active duty in the United States Army before the year’s end. He saw action in the European Theater and fought at the Battle of the Bulge. He earned the Combat Infantry Badge, two Purple Hearts, and the Bronze Star. Sergeant Collins was discharged in January of 1946.

Then he did what truly distinguishes the men and women of that generation. He came home, gratefully and modestly. He never talked much about his sacrifice and the hardships of war. Instead, he worked hard raising six children, running a business, serving as Scout leader, Rotarian, Mayor, and State Senator.

From the strong shoulders of those like him who defended our freedom, all Americans learn about commitment, service, and patriotism. We learn that the burden of service must be borne willingly. We learn that challenges must be met and threats must be confronted. We learn that the mantle of hero must be worn with humility. It is because of the quiet courage of those who serve our country that we take those lessons to heart and resolve to pass them on to the generations to come. That is the "Spirit of '45." It is the spirit that guided our nation through its darkest days and that lights our way into the future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Susan Collins". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Susan M. Collins
United States Senator