

Sen. Susan M. Collins
Spirit of '45 Day video
Aug. 14, 2015

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

Seven decades later, that “Spirit of ‘45” remains strong. The heroes of all those years ago, in uniform and on the home front, provide 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 was an even greater honor to join in that effort with my two late colleagues, Senator Daniel Inouye and Senator Frank Lautenberg, the last two World War II veterans to serve in the Senate. Senator Inouye lost his arm in combat, and his sacrifice reminded all of us that freedom is not free.

The “Spirit of ‘45” goes beyond courage in battle and support at home. It includes America’s commitment to restore nations shattered by conflict, whether friend or foe, 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 Greatest Generation.

I am fortunate to be a daughter of that generation. My father, Don Collins enlisted in the Reserve Corps as a college freshman in November of 1943 and was called to active duty in the Army before the year's end. He saw action in the European Theater and was wounded twice in 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 America's armed forces. 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.

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.

From the strong shoulders of those like him who defended our freedom, we learn about commitment, service, and patriotism. We learn that the burden of service must be borne willingly, that challenges must be met, and threats must be confronted. 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.