

# Anthony Pavia (opinion): Every name on Stamford's Memorial Wall tells a story

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The Memorial Wall in Veterans Memorial Park in Stamford.

John Breunig / Hearst Connecticut Media

Since the French and Indian War more than 250 years ago, Stamford has had an extraordinary legacy of service and sacrifice. The most prominent symbol of this sacrifice is the Memorial Wall in Veterans Memorial Park downtown. A look at the tall granite monolith reveals more than 400 names of those who gave their lives in this country's wars. Each name provides its own story of

courage, selflessness, and promise lost.

The names on that wall represent the great diversity of this country: every religion, race, and ethnicity, every social standing, and every neighborhood in this city. Seven local men were killed during the French and Indian War, including brothers Deliverance and Sylvanus Slason.

During the American Revolution, 19 men did not return home. Four local men were killed in the War of 1812, despite the fact that Connecticut did not support the war and refused to commission government troops to fight.

During the Civil War, Stamford lost 119 of its citizens in the fight to end slavery and preserve the Union. The Hobby, Peatt, and Waterbury families each lost two of their sons. The Lockwood family story is even more tragic. Sherman Lockwood died in combat in 1863, and two of his brothers survived the horrors of the battle for Fort Wagner only to perish at Andersonville, the infamous Confederate prison. Additionally, 40 names on the wall were Stamford men who served with the 128th Infantry Regiment and were killed during the battle at Fort Hudson on the Mississippi River.

During World War I, this town suffered 39 losses, including men who died in such faraway places as Chateau-Thierry and the Meuse River. Some were lost at sea and, for the first time, in the skies above Europe. Samuel Tresser, for whom the Boulevard is named, was killed in the fierce battle in the Argonne Forest. Robert Crandall, a local man designated as being from "High Ridge," was posthumously awarded the Croix de Guerre from the French government, The Order of the Crown from Belgium, and the Distinguished Service Cross, one of our nation's highest awards. This year, the Memorial Wall will also add its first woman, Red Cross Nurse Mary Nurney, who gave her life in the service of the American soldiers for whom she cared. Mary, who died just a few days before the end of the "War to End

All Wars," was given a military funeral and a Gold Medallion, which was traditionally bestowed upon our war dead.

The Second World War inflicted catastrophic losses on Stamford, with more than 200 citizens lost in the war against the Axis Powers. They died in all corners of the globe and received every citation for heroism and valor. You will see names on the wall that represent the children of immigrants as well as Mayflower descendents. You will see names such as Wasserman, D'Agostino, Grabowski, Johnson, and Molina. Many of the names are of boys who lived on the same street. Three families — the Kijeks, Lovelands and the Austins — lost two of their sons. Two men, Vincent Horan and William O'Neill, were killed at Pearl Harbor on the morning of Dec. 7. Several Stamford men, including Myles Fox, were posthumously awarded the Navy Cross for their exceptional courage. Gus Belasco survived wars in Haiti, China, and World War I, only to be killed in the Pacific during the Second World War. He left behind a 10-year-old daughter. Benjamin Praeger escaped a concentration camp in Europe, came to the United States, enlisted in the U.S. Army, and was killed in Germany during the last year of the war. John Scalzi and Leonard Volpe survived the horrors of combat but were killed in accidents on the way home from war.

The Korean and Vietnam Wars were no less tragic. The stories of these men on the wall are haunting and at times, gut-wrenching. At the time, these deaths often received little notice and were overshadowed by the upheaval of the day, but they are nonetheless inspirational examples of courage and sacrifice. Kurt Jobst was posthumously awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for his action at Tay Ninh. Stuart Andrews, Alfons Bankowski, and Richard Rich, who survived the Korean War, volunteered for service in Vietnam and did not make it home. Al Bankowski left behind a fiance. Stuart Andrews and Richard Rich left behind a total of six young children. Eugene Manselle III and Alfred Kaspaul, whose family fled Communist East Germany,

left high school to serve in Vietnam. Neither young man made it home. Alfred left behind his parents and two sisters, while Eugene left behind his parents and 10 brothers and sisters.

In 2011, U.S. Navy Seal Brian Bill was killed in Afghanistan defending this country in the Global War on Terrorism. Brian's death represented Stamford's first loss in more than 40 years and served as a painful reminder to a new generation of the immeasurable cost of our freedom.

These are but a very few of the stories to be found on the Memorial Wall at Veterans Park. They underscore Stamford's profound sacrifice over the past 21/2 centuries, and are cause for tremendous pride, humility, and solemn reflection.

Memorial Day is a day for such reflection. It is the one day that we are asked to recognize the tremendous cost of living in a free and democratic society. Accordingly, I urge every citizen to turn out and support the Memorial Day Parade, which kicks off at noon Sunday and is followed by a ceremony at Veterans Memorial Park. If you are a parent, bring your children! In doing so, you will be honoring not only those who made the ultimate sacrifice, but also the many veterans who returned home to live meaningful and impactful lives.

And while you are there, you might want to take a few moments and pay a visit to the Memorial Wall and give quiet thanks to the more than 400 citizens of Stamford who never had the opportunity to return home, enjoy their families, or fulfill their potential. I assure you it will be a humbling and fulfilling way to honor Memorial Day.

*Anthony Pavia is a former principal of Stamford and Trinity Catholic high schools and a historian.*