

May 18, 2008 - Murtha Recognizes Local WWII Veterans

JOHNSTOWN, PA -- Congressman

John P. Murtha, Chairman of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Defense, joined state and local officials today to recognize and pay tribute to nearly 1,000 Cambria County World War II veterans.

The event, organized by the Conemaugh Valley Veterans, recognized each veteran in attendance and provided them with both a medal and citation. Congressman Murtha was the featured speaker, and below are his remarks:

Honoring Cambria
County WWII
Veterans

Congressman John P. Murtha

May 18, 2008

You have been called by many as "the Greatest Generation." Yet, these two words cannot fully grasp the enormity of both your sacrifice and victory.

You grew up amidst the greatest economic challenge our nation has ever seen. During a period of sharp debt and massive unemployment, you answered the call to service.

I was just eight years old when the United States entered World War II, but I remember my father leaving home to serve in the European Campaign. His two brothers also served during the war, one of whom was shot down and imprisoned in a German P.O.W. camp.

Every American was involved one way or another during the war. On the street where I grew up in Mt. Pleasant, the duplex house next door had two families with five members each that served. I remember helping my mother collect tinfoil and milkweed so that we could send them to the factories to be used in the production of both weapons and supplies. Nearly six million women across America joined the production and assembly lines. Their contribution was enormous, and another 350,000 women joined the armed forces for the first time. Americans that

were not involved in the fighting or factories made contributions in other ways: rationing, price controls and purchasing war bonds.

In 1940, President Roosevelt said the U.S. would produce 50,000 airplanes during the next four years. Everyone thought that he had lost his mind. It turned out that we produced 86,000 planes in 1943 alone, in addition to 30,000 tanks, six million rifles and 61 million pairs of wool socks. In 1940, military spending as a percent of our Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was 1.7 percent. By 1943, it rose to 37 percent. The size of the U.S. Army was only 125,000 men leading up to the peace-time draft in 1940. By 1943, the Army had increased to over six million.

I mention these statistics to remind us that there is nothing America cannot do when Americans are presented with clear vision and firm leadership.

By the time the Germans and the Japanese surrendered in 1945, over 16 million American men and women served in uniform, more than 60 percent were draftees. Over 400,000 gave their lives and nearly 700,000 were wounded.

I visited the American Cemetery at Normandy seven years ago. Over 9,000 Americans are buried there. This landing was the turning point for the European Campaign, yet there was no visitor center that put into perspective the enormity of what happened on June 6, 1944. Many people from our area landed in Normandy and fought their way through France and into Germany. Congressman Dave Obey and I went to the American Battle Monuments Commission and proposed an interpretive center to remind visitors and future generations of the battle and Allied victory. Last year, we dedicated a new Normandy visitor center that commemorates the valiant effort of our troops, the sacrifices of our nation, the defeat of Germany and the liberation of Europe.

Following WWII, the United States was at a peak of industrial strength and envied throughout the world. We formed the Marshall Plan to rebuild Europe. We created the G.I. Bill to provide an education for returning veterans. Almost eight million WWII veterans used the G.I. Bill, and we generated seven dollars for every dollar invested. Just this week, the U.S. House of Representatives passed legislation that will significantly increase the educational benefits of our nation's veterans who have served since September 11, 2001. I, like many of you, was given the opportunity to attend college under the G.I. Bill, and it is our responsibility to ensure that America's next generation of veterans receive the educational benefits they rightfully deserve.

My great grandmother, whose husband served in the Civil War, told me when I was six years old that "we are put on this Earth to make a difference." All of you brought peace and hope to a world ravaged by the darkness of war, you defeated tyranny and oppression, and you made a difference in the lives of every citizen of this great country and world.

Every American owes you all a debt of gratitude, and today we offer our appreciation for a generation marked by courage, sacrifice and greatness.

Thank you.