

The 70th Anniversary of WWII's End

By Anna Dembowski

World War II ended 70 years ago May 8 in Europe and a few months later in the Pacific. But the magnitude of the war's end still reverberates to this day.

Reverend Arnold Taylor, 89, was so impacted by the war's destruction that he devoted himself to a life of peace in the clergy.

"The war ending meant that we would stop killing other human beings," said Taylor, a veteran of the 99th Infantry Division in Europe. "And of course it still goes on, and you know we're still sending soldiers over there, and that sort of lack of understanding thinks that our war to end wars is over. Seventy years ago we got the job done. And it's understandable that in years after that others would pick up the same damned attitude about human life: 'If they don't believe the way I do, kill 'em.' And that just blows my mind."

For Terry Shima, a veteran of the famed 442nd Regional Combat Team, the all-Japanese American unit that became the Army's most highly decorated outfit for its size, the war's end was a victory in combating racial prejudice across the nation.

"We (Japanese Americans) also wondered if we had achieved our second goal – the first being winning the war," said Shima, 92. "Our second mission was to demonstrate on the battlefield that we were as loyal to America as any other soldier."

Japanese Americans had been declared unfit for military duty, detained, and branded as disloyal, because their skin color was the same as that of the nation's enemy, Shima said. The 442nd was formed from petitioning the government to let them fight in the war abroad while fighting prejudice at home.

"Over 800 Nisei (Japanese Americans) paid the ultimate price to achieve their mission,"

Shima said. "We were the only ethnic group that went into combat during World War II to prove our loyalty."

Seventy years later, that victory has leveled the playing field for minorities in the U.S. to compete for any job and rank, reaching the highest levels in the military, government, academia and business, Shima said.

And he said the importance of remembering the war so many decades later lies in bettering the younger generation.

"We need to keep the memories alive of what happened during World War II," Shima said. "So I think that the better new generations can be briefed, I think that they would be smarter when they are faced with similar decisions in the future as a government."

Col. Ed Shames, commander of the third platoon of E Company – the company made famous by HBO's "Band of Brothers" – said there were no heroes in this war.

"As people might think that because you just got home from overseas, a big war, that you a big hero, but this is not the case, because everybody that you knew that was in the category of your age – everyone – was in some kind of a service," Shames said. "If they were sane or if they were sensible and if they could read and write, they were in the military – everybody. So we were all the same. There was no such thing as a big hero."

And as everyone returned home, Shames said he sought to re-civilize.

"(The war's end is important) because you were in it, and you were hoping that nothing else would ever happen that would put you in the position that you were in at that time," Shames said.

Seventy years after returning home, these three men are participating in the National

Memorial Day Parade, the only public parade in Washington to salute the World War II generation on this anniversary. Only a fraction of the 16 million who served still remain, and The

Veterans of World War II have been named as Grand Marshals in this year's parade, as dozens of living veterans will represent all who have served and the more than 400,000 who made

the ultimate sacrifice.

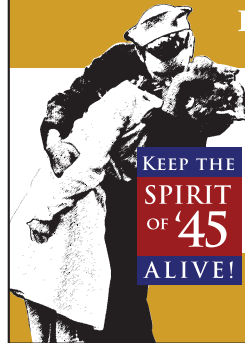
"Whether they were rear echelon or front lines, they served. And together, we did the job. We did Hitler in," Taylor said. "And that was 70 years ago, and it is still vibrant in my mind."

The Spirit of '45 will also participate in this year's parade to remember the war's end. The organization has planned events across the country for Aug. 14-16 to commemorate the 70th anniversary. Events include a "kiss-in" on the east and west coasts – a tribute to the famed "VJ Day in Times Square Kiss" photo, rallies, and a global wreath laying ceremony.



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