



# Remembering the war on Veterans Day

*Enshrined Here  
In Eternal Tribute  
To Those Who Fought  
Our Country's Battles*

These words appear on the lintel of a nearly forgotten memorial — four pillars of concrete shrouded by overgrown yews in the small green triangle across the street from the Takoma Park library. Erected in 1957, the memorial serves as mute witness to another kind of war, one worth remembering this Veterans Day when young American soldiers are again fighting and dying on foreign soil.

The war America fought from 1941 and 1945 caused a vastly different reaction in Takoma Park than the war that entangles us in Iraq. Where today lawn signs proclaim “War is Not the Answer,” the entire Takoma community during World War II voluntarily installed blackout curtains on home windows in support of the war effort. Civil Defense volunteers (back then CD did not mean compact disks) patrolled the streets every night to insure no window light was escaping that might guide German warplanes.

Longtime resident Dorothy Barnes also remembers her father spending many a night at a monitoring tower on Powder Mill Road, scanning the sky for German planes.

If you think this was hysteria, consider that at least one German U-boat lies at the bottom of the Potomac near Piney Point.

Everyone on the home front understood



*Takoma Park's (often forgotten) war memorial is located across from the Takoma Park library.*

jobs in the federal bureaucracy so young men could be freed up to enlist as soldiers. Takoma residents welcomed the new arrivals and offered rooms in their houses. In 1944 *Life* magazine featured the students at Montgomery Blair who took over the work of janitors and other school employees to allow these men to fight overseas. Many a high school senior left directly for boot camp on graduation day.

Those at home anxiously followed the progress of the war by radio and newspaper. Film newsreels at Takoma Theatre provided visual accounts and served as prequels to patriotic movies.

Takoma Park's major contribution to the war effort, however, was Bliss Electrical School in North Takoma. When Dr. Louis Bliss, a long time friend of Thomas Edison, established his training school in 1893, he could hardly have imagined the demand for wartime electricians. From 1942 to 1945, the school was under special military contract, and trained 4,000 enlisted navy men for work as technicians in radio and radar.

Bliss came to Takoma Park in 1908 to take over B.F. Gilbert's failing North Takoma hotel.

Although the hotel was destroyed by fire almost immediately, Bliss rebuilt it as a school that earned a national reputation for turning out highly-trained electricians. At the Bliss School everything an electrical engineer needed to know was condensed into one intense year of studies, an innovation soon copied by other training schools around the country. Graduates of the Bliss school, though, were considered the cream.

Once the war ended, Bliss realized his

school had outlived its usefulness and smartly joined forces with the fledgling Montgomery Junior College, opened in 1946 with the specific intent of giving former soldiers a chance for a college education on the GI bill. The Bliss Electrical School found new life as the first permanent home of the college, renamed Montgomery College in 1969.

Another institution with a huge role in the war effort was Walter Reed Army Medical Center, located just across the District line. Founded in 1909 by Dr. Walter Reed (who cracked the puzzle of how yellow fever spread), it occupies 113 acres along Georgia Avenue and is the Army's largest medical facility. During World War II it was overwhelmed by a sobering array of the wounded. A particular high number of them were amputees.

By 1942 the Army required additional facilities to house amputees learning the skills to rejoin society and accordingly seized an exclusive girls school at Forest Glen, five miles away. (Later abandoned by the Army, the campus has recently been the focus of a neighborhood rescue campaign that will restore the original collection of quirky buildings and build additional condos.)

In 1957, the American Legion installed



*The grounds of Walter Reed Army Medical Center, c. 1925.*

Takoma Park's war memorial at Philadelphia and Maple Avenues — the only war memorial in town (with the exception of a plaque at the Presbyterian Church honoring six young church members who perished in the conflict). The toll of WWII had already made Takoma Park more of a “peace-loving” town, and in the following years the members of the Vietnam War generation who settled here further changed the social and political climate.

In Takoma Park the American Legion gave way to the Veterans of Foreign War. Rich Fales, VFW Post Commander notes, “Although there's only a handful of us are still left, we have a wreath-laying ceremony on Memorial Day.” The VFW

IMAGE COURTESY: HISTORIC TAKOMA



*The classroom building of Bliss Electrical School, located at Fenton & Takoma Aves, was later used by Montgomery College.*

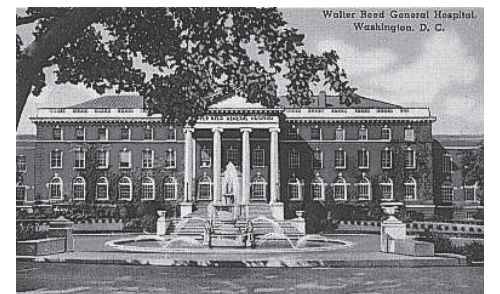
headquarters in the Pinecrest neighborhood has been up for sale for more than a year.

There is no plan for a ceremony at Takoma Park memorial on the “11<sup>th</sup> hour of the 11<sup>th</sup> day of the 11<sup>th</sup> month” (the official designation for Veterans Day), but the sacrifices and deeds of that generation may be worth a few moments of remembrance nonetheless.

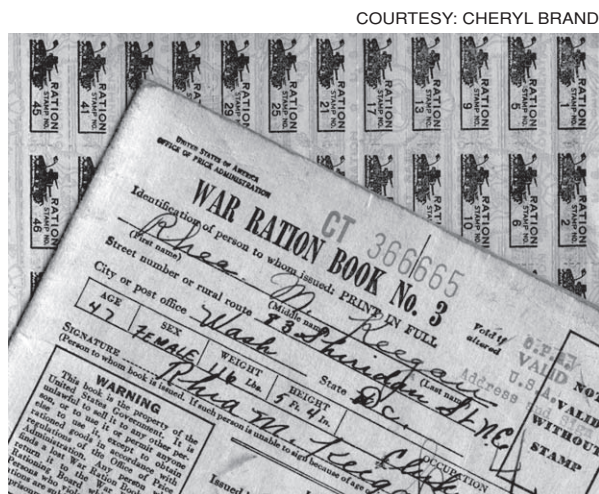
*Diana Kohn is education chair of Historic Takoma, Inc., dedicated to preserving the heritage of Takoma-DC and Takoma Park-MD. She would like to applaud the city's Public Works Department for their recent effort cleaning away years of*

*grime from the memorial in time for Veteran's Day 2006.*

*Read more files from the Takoma Archives online at [www.takoma.com](http://www.takoma.com).*



*Walter Reed General Hospital, Washington DC, circa 1930.*



*War Ration Books were issued by the Office of Price Administration. The stamps authorized the purchase of certain goods, but the supply of stamps usually exceeded the supply of goods.*

the need to give up such luxuries as nylons, new shoes and butter, as well as items that had been necessities: tires and gasoline. Barnes remembers, “Even if you had ration stamps there was nothing to buy. I remember a time standing in line for an hour and all we could get was a half pound of butter, because that's all there was.” Victory gardens helped fill in the gaps.

Young single women flocked to the greater Washington area to take over desk

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