

A Wartime Tradition: Islanders Have Long Supported Troops Overseas

By Bruce Haulman and Terry Donnelly

Vashon Island has a long history of supporting our troops serving in far off wars. On Veterans Day it is appropriate to recognize how the Island has always celebrated and supported our veterans.

During World War II (1941-1945), Vashon postmaster John Ober began to pay tribute to the Island's military men and women by compiling the "Island Roll of Honor." Vashon veterans served in every branch of the armed services and in every theater of the war. Of the 431 men and women recorded, many members of the same families served, and each community sent its young off to become what would later be called "the greatest generation."



1945 Island Roll of Honor – Vashon-Maury Island Heritage Museum

A gold star was placed next to the names of the 13 killed. There are 20 women among the 431 names, and 12 of the veterans were Japanese-Americans who had been interned before they volunteered and were sent to the European front. The framed Roll of Honor, seen in the photograph, originally hung in the Veterans of Foreign Wars hall. It is now on display in the Vashon-Maury Island Heritage Museum.

During the Vietnam War (1964-1973), Islanders organized to send cookies to troops serving in Southeast Asia. When Islander Linda Harmeling Kendrick learned that churches across the country were sending home-baked cookies to troops, she decided to organize the women from the Vashon Presbyterian Church. Linda's husband Staff Sgt. Larry Kendrick was serving with his 115 men near Tuy Hue in the II Corps Tactical Combat Zone of central South Vietnam. The Presbyterian women baked chewy fruit bars for their first shipment of cookies and collected three-pound coffee cans in which to ship them. Vashon was "very supportive of the troops over there. The 'Cookie Project' was something tangible that we could do to show our support," according to Shirley Gilliland.



February 8, 1968 photograph – Vashon-Maury Island Beachcomber

In the 1968 Beachcomber photograph, Mrs. Kendrick, Mrs. Harlan Gilliland, Mrs. Hoot Gibson and Mrs. Leon Rosser are pictured packing 26 cans with cookies for shipment. In 1968, married women were referred to by their husband's names, not by their own names. Things have changed!

During the Iraq War (2001-Present) Islander Sue Nebeker decided to take action to support wounded warriors by organizing a quilt-a-thon of more than 80 people to make quilts for retuning wounded troops. This was the beginning of the American Hero Quilt Project. By this Veterans Day, the American Hero Quilt Project will have delivered 10,000 quilts to our wounded warriors.

In the 2011 photograph, pictured left to right are Colleen McClure, Sharon Aukland, Marie Blickfield, Margaret Bickle, Nancy Zellerhoff and Jo Ann Bardeen with some of the red, white and blue quilts ready for delivery to wounded warriors.



2011 Photograph Courtesy of Sue Nebeker and the American Hero Quilt Project

Islanders have also supported troops during the Afghanistan War (2001-Present). When 1st Lt. Robert Bennedsen was killed on July 18, 2010, the Island organized to fulfill his family's plan to support the men and women under his command by sending "care packages" to those who never received anything. The Fallen Soldier's Platoon Project was born to send items the troops had requested, including mechanic's gloves, green uniform socks, sunscreen, hand warmers, preserved foods, powdered Gatorade, cans of tuna, toothpaste, toothbrushes, razors, reading material, flip flops and hard candy. Islanders are encouraged to support the project with donations of cash or items. Although 70 years separate World War II from today, the 1945 Island Roll of Honor, the 1968 Cookies for Servicemen Project, the current American Hero Quilt Project, and the current Fallen Soldier's Platoon Project all represent Vashon's commitment to honor our troops in the midst of war, no matter how controversial the war may be. We have learned to honor our servicemen and women whether we agree or disagree with the decision-makers who send them in harm's way.

Three events are scheduled this Veterans Day Weekend to honor Vashon veterans. At 7 p.m. Thursday, Nov. 10, at the Vashon-Maury Land Trust Building,

the Heritage Museum is sponsoring “Women and the Vietnam War,” a talk by Dr. Marianne Jacobs. Jacobs served as a nurse in Vietnam during the war, was on the Vietnam Women’s Memorial Committee and is a noted anthropologist who studies the role of women in the Vietnam War.

The Vashon-Maury Island Heritage Museum is currently hosting the exhibit *Home of Record: Vashon and the Vietnam War*, which will be open from 1 to 4 p.m. on Friday, Nov. 11, Veterans Day.

And on Saturday, Nov. 12, the American Quilt Project will hold a fundraiser to celebrate having delivered 9,501 Hero Quilts and to raise funds to continue their work. The fundraiser will include an English Tea from 1:30 to 3:30 p.m. and a silent auction — including cocktails and appetizers — 7 to 9:30 p.m., both at Vashon Island Books located at the former VFW Hall.