

Memorial Day Remarks
Mayor Jennifer Gregerson
May 25, 2020

Every year, Americans take time off from work and school to reflect on the sacrifices made by so many to protect and defend the freedoms we enjoy. Today, we honor those brave women and men who gave what President Lincoln described as “the last full measure of devotion”—they gave their lives.

I am proud that the City of Mukilteo has been honored and recognized for our support of our own citizen soldiers, those city employees who volunteer and serve our country. As Mayor, I can say that supporting our employees who choose to serve is one small way that we can honor their sacrifices.

But this tradition of service calls to mind an earlier generation of volunteers—the women and men who made up the Aircraft Warning Service in Mukilteo during World War 2.

You can picture the shock and fear that captivated the nation after the attack on Pearl Harbor. Not since 1812 had the U.S. homeland been attacked by a foreign enemy, Americans felt safely protected by the two vast oceans on either side of us.

But the attack on Pearl Harbor changed that, and the entire Pacific coast was put on high alert. As a coastal town with an Army Air Base in our backyard at Paine Field, Mukilteo residents were asked to join in defense of the homeland.

Otto Zahler, the President of the Mukilteo Improvement Club, a group that organized the community before the City was incorporated in 1947, wrote an urgent message to members the day after the Pearl Harbor attack, calling a meeting to plan for potential air raids: “Don’t think that this matter can wait until tomorrow or next week,” he wrote. “This community needs to be organized immediately in order to protect ourselves.”

Newspaper reports from the era tell us that there were two observation towers erected in the town, one near the intersection of 4th Street and the Speedway, another further up the hill near the reservoir at Park and 7th Street.

These observation towers were staffed 24 hours a day, by volunteers serving four hour shifts. If they saw any suspicious aircraft or a dreaded incendiary “Fu-Go” balloon, they were instructed to immediately report it to the county sheriff.

The continuous observation lasted until May 1944, nearly three years of round-the-clock work by volunteers, keeping our community safe. And in a sign of the changes the war was having on our society, the effort was largely run by the women in town. Mrs. Henry Brown served as the Chief Observer, and of those recognized for their service by the Army Airforce, half were women.

I wonder what Mrs. Henry Brown would think, if she knew that 70 years later, Mukilteo would have a woman as our Chief Executive!

These dedicated residents, motivated by their sense of patriotism and civic duty, remind us of the many sacrifices made by families on the home front during that war. From food rationing to Victory Gardens, from mothers who went to work in the factories to mothers who lost sons in the war, every American was touched by the war.

We are fortunate that our conflicts today are not nearly as serious, but today is an opportunity to reflect on our role in supporting and assisting those who do fight for our freedoms.

As employers, do we support and encourage our employees who serve in the Guard and Reserve?

As Americans, do we ensure that our government cares for the wounded and the veterans when they return home?

As friends and neighbors, do we extend a helping hand to the families left behind while a servicemember is off in some distant place?

On this Memorial Day, we pause to reflect on those who gave so much, so we could live in freedom. As we reflect on them, brave women and men, let's also reflect on how we can support today's citizen soldiers and their families too.