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Sectional survivors

The baseball and softball teams at Bishop Kearney and Geneva DeSales managed to stay alive during the first two rounds of sectional play last week. Pages 12-13.



Veterans kept faith under fire

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

WATERLOO — As veterans gathered with families and friends in the parking lot of Waterloo Senior High School on the overcast morning of May 30, World War II Naval veteran Barney Olschewski spoke plainly about those who view Memorial Day as an excuse for picnics and barbecues.

"This is not a day of celebration," remarked Olschewski, a parishioner at St. Patrick's Church in Seneca Falls. "I don't know what the hell they're celebrating. It's supposed to be in memory of the ones who went and didn't come back."

Those who "didn't come back" are the hundreds of thousands of U.S. servicemen and women who have died in the nation's wars — declared and undeclared — from the fields of Lexington and Concord, to the sands of Kuwait and Iraq.

A number of those who paid the ultimate price for citizenship were Catholics — Catholics whose faith promised them hope of passing into another life when their mortal ones had ended. Often that passage came prematurely for young people sent to serve on behalf of their country.

Veterans who spoke with the *Catholic Courier* on Memorial Day in this town unanimously agreed that "there are no atheists in foxholes."

But behind that flippant observation is a deep sense many veterans share that war brought them closer to their Catholic faith — a faith tested by fire

among servicemen and women who have seen the end of so many of their comrades' lives by combat and disease.

Indeed, Olschewski remembered that many of his fellow servicemen in the Second World War were glad to attend any religious service, regardless of whether a rabbi, a priest or a minister was presiding.

"I guess that was the only thing we had to hang on to," Olschewski recalled.

Olschewski's comments were echoed by William Gill, editor of *Catholic War Veteran*, a bimonthly newsletter published by the veterans organization of the same name.

"The big thing is your faith gets very high-pitched," WWII veteran Gill told the *Catholic Courier* in a phone interview from his home in Cleveland, Ohio. "You just never know what's going to happen. I think those men that were in the service ... all turned to the good Lord."


One such wartime believer who helped to establish Waterloo's St. Mary's Parish (founded in 1846) also helped to establish Memorial Day — or Decoration Day as it was then called — 125 years ago.

John Graham, an Irish-Catholic immigrant who fought for the Union in the War Between the States, marched in the town's first Memorial Day Parade, honoring those who had fallen in the bloody war that had ended the year before.

On May 30, 1991, his great-grandson, Richard Graham, a parishioner of St. Vincent DePaul Parish in Churchville, made a pilgrimage to Waterloo to remember his ancestor who fought in 14 Civil War battles.

Following that war, John Graham and his former comrades in arms joined with such citizens as pharmacist Henry C. Welles and Seneca County Clerk John Murray to establish a day to honor the war dead by decorating their graves. Waterloo was

officially
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The 140th New York Volunteer Reenactment Group uses an American flag with 35 stars (right), an exact replica of the one carried into battle by Monroe County's 140th regiment during the Civil War in 1862. Today's flag (left) boasts 50 stars. Both flags are courtesy of Douglas Elliott, a member of the reenactment group.