

This Memorial Day, Let's Build a WWI Memorial

Op-Ed by Joe Weishaar, Lead Designer

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The National World War One Memorial in Pershing Park, Washington D.C.

As many Americans around the country take a moment to relax with friends and family this Memorial Day, I hope they take a moment to pause over their grills and swimming pools to ponder what the holiday really

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represents.

It's been my absolute pleasure the last 10 months to be involved in what I often consider an overwhelming project; designing the National World War One Memorial in Washington, D.C. I must admit that before I began I hadn't given much thought to WWI.

For anyone who didn't know that there isn't already a National WWI Memorial in D.C., I can't say I blame you. It was a war that happened nearly two generations before I was born and events like WWII and the Great Depression greatly overshadowed learning about it while I was in school. Yet here we are, and next year is the 100th anniversary of American troops heading over to Europe. Our capital is lacking a memorial to what is commonly referred to as "The Great War" and "the war to end all wars." It was a war that changed the face of our industry, our technology and our place in the world.

As a 26 year old, I don't yet fully know what I can do to make change and progress in this country, but I do know that 100 years ago young Americans just like me were about to head off to fight in WWI, and they fought for the ideals that would go on to define the American century.

When I submitted a design to this competition nearly a year ago I only had a glimmer of hope that it would progress to this stage. However, I did so with the idea that it was

important to do all I could to honor the men and women who once defended freedom and self-determination for their towns, states, and country. Not only has it been a life changing experience to stand up in Washington and tell people about my ideas for a memorial park, but now it is a humbling honor to find myself at the head of this great undertaking. The memorial design in progress is a tribute to our humanity and a marker of courageous acts in the most harrowing of circumstances.

Just like enlistment was in the Great War, this is a volunteer effort. Time and donations are coming solely from the citizens of this country with no tax dollars or government spending. 100 years ago more than 116,000 Americans lost their lives defending their small towns like the one in Arkansas that I came from. It is time they had a proper memorial in our nation's capital. The building of this memorial sends a signal, a signal to your families, children and grandchildren that courage, honor and sacrifice still mean something. It is a message to our current and future veterans that they will not be forgotten when their time comes.

As Memorial Day approaches this year I hope you keep the soldiers of WWI in your thoughts. It is time for us to give back for the sacrifices they made almost 100 years ago. With this project, we need this same sense of service from every American to make it happen and I hope you will support me in this effort. Examples of my design and opportunities to give can be found at ww1cc.org/design.