

A Great American

His name was John Norris. He was a soldier – a fighter who served in several of the key battles of World War II. He also happened to be my uncle. My earliest recollections of him were when he returned from the war. He was a handsome young military man in uniform, with numerous decorations proclaiming his bravery in action and diligence to duty. He had an attractive blonde wife – my mother’s sister – whom he adored. And, he drove a sporty convertible automobile, which always got my attention every time he drove up to the house.

He was a fun-loving individual who delighted in telling and hearing a funny story. But there was always a very quiet, introspective side of him. If questioned about the war and his exploits, he got a faraway look in his eyes, and his response was always polite but firm: he was not going to talk about it. Only in later years did I learn much about his involvement. He began to open up about where he had fought, and the battle plans, and the success of the operations. A mist would appear in his eyes as he detailed the bombs and mortar shells exploding around him, and the buddies he lost as the troops moved on their objective. Throughout his lifetime, he maintained a fierce loyalty – a kind of reverence – for the American flag he had fought to defend.

In my mind – then and now – my uncle was a true hero, much more so than those today to whom that term is applied, such as sports figures or rock stars. He is a reason why Veterans Day is always special to me. That national observance was officially Sunday, Nov. 11, the anniversary of the signing of the Armistice that ended World War I. All major hostilities of that conflict ended at the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month of 1918 with the German signing of the Armistice. The holiday was originally

proclaimed to honor those who served in all American wars. It has since evolved as a time to pay tribute to living veterans who have served in the military during wartime or peacetime, partially to complement Memorial Day, which primarily honors the dead.

Since Life Care and Century Park have many veterans living in our centers, today – the designated holiday – is an opportunity to show our appreciation for their service and sacrifices in many ways. We owe them a great debt of gratitude for preserving the freedoms afforded to us by this nation. In military parlance, we salute them one and all.

And in my mind, I will be traveling to that one cemetery plot in Cookeville, Tennessee, where a dedicated soldier lies at rest. He was a good uncle, and a great American.

- Beecher Hunter