

**By SAM HATCHER**

The past Memorial Day weekend, while providing a time for rest and recreation, was also a fitting and appropriate time to remember those who have served in military uniforms and paid the ultimate price while protecting our great country and the many freedoms we enjoy.

But what about today, tomorrow and next week? We tend to place so much importance on a single day when in fact we should recognize these heroes every day of every year.

I'm just finishing (Watertown native) Woody McMillin's book, *In the Presence of Soldiers*, about the soldiers and their training in Middle Tennessee during World War II. He paints a very vivid picture of how these servicemen sacrificed and trained in extreme weather conditions and faced numerous perils in order to prepare themselves for real combat situations in the European war theater.

From 1941 to 1944, more than 850,000 soldiers trained for combat across several Middle Tennessee counties. Lebanon was the center of activity for much of the training as the Second Army chose Cumberland University for its Maneuver Director Headquarters.

These soldiers trained here primarily because the climate and terrain closely resembled that of Europe.

They came to Middle Tennessee from all over the U.S. They left families at home, forfeited their jobs, and made their way here to learn how to be the best soldiers possible.

And from this locale they were deployed to zones of danger across Europe and in some cases to fight the war against the Japanese in the Pacific.

Thousands of American lives were lost during World War II and thousands have died since in wars in Southeast Asia, Korea and the Middle East. And before World War II thousands died in World War I, the Civil War and the American Revolution.

These men and women who have paid the ultimate price for us deserve our thoughts each day of the year and not just on one day circled on the calendar as Memorial Day.

Life is so very precious. To think that these people, these most honorable heroes, dedicated their lives for other men to be free is so, so overwhelming.

Let's remember well past Memorial Day these heroes. Let's remember them each day and in doing so remember that it is largely because of them that we speak freely, have open elections, attend the church of our choice and have so many other privileges that others do not.

God bless America and God bless those who have protected our great nation.