

2016 RES-139
Dane County Atomic Veterans Recognition Day July 16

Millions have served our country through military service including in wartime. Most came home and continued to serve their communities in the best ways they were capable of. Veterans Day acknowledges the military service of our fellow citizens; on Memorial Day, we remember those who gave their lives that we may continue to enjoy the freedoms of life in these United States.

While many military service members could expect to face life threatening conditions on battle fronts, most were not prepared nor expected to be a part of our country's experiments with weapons of mass destruction.

On July 16, 1945, in the New Mexico desert, the first atomic bomb was successfully detonated. Three weeks later, on the 6th and 9th of August, atomic bombs were exploded over the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Though the bombings precipitated the conclusion of war between Japan and the U.S., reaction to the destruction and unfathomable death toll in the two Japanese cities was overwhelming. There were widespread calls from both scientists and lay persons for such weapons to be outlawed.

Yet, there were elements in our government who were intrigued by this new line of weapons. In a short time, the U. S. Navy called for volunteers to participate in a program to test the effectiveness of atomic weapons against naval vessels.

The number of volunteers fell far below expectations, so personnel were simply assigned to this operation, and many others that followed. Between 1945 and 1963, the United States conducted some 235 atmospheric nuclear weapons tests in the Pacific and the American Southwest.

At least 220,000 American service men and women witnessed and participated in these tests, or served in forces occupying Hiroshima and Nagasaki immediately following World War II. They were exposed to the potentially harmful effects of ionizing radiation in these weapons. Many of them have endured serious health consequences.

These service members, who refer to themselves as Atomic Veterans, are generally proud to have served their country. They feel, however, that they were forced to be subjects in a risky experiment for which they were denied the option of informed consent.

It is only fitting that their dedication to duty be afforded proper recognition by Dane County and be brought to the attention of all Americans.

Be it resolved that July 16th, in this and ensuing years, be known as ATOMIC VETERANS RECOGNITION DAY.

Sharon Corrigan, Chair
Dane County Board of Supervisors

Signed and sealed before me this
14th day of July, 2016

Scott McDonell,
Dane County Clerk