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SDDVA SECRETARY SCHNEIDER'S AUGUST COLUMN – SEASONS OF REMEMBRANCE

Every August and September, we are reminded that the tapestry of American freedom is woven with sacrifice. These months hold solemn historical anniversaries and local moments of honor, binding us anew to the legacy of South Dakota's military heroes. The South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs invites you not only to remember but to participate—whether at commemorative events, educational programs, or in quiet reflection.

The U.S. Coast Guard Birthday was celebrated on August 4, marking the founding of the Coast Guard in 1790 as the Revenue-Marine by then-Secretary of the Treasury Alexander Hamilton. August 4th honors the Coast Guard's long history of protecting the nation's waterways, enforcing maritime laws, and conducting lifesaving missions.

Purple Heart Day was observed on August 7 to honor the brave men and women of the U.S. military who were wounded or killed in combat. The Purple Heart medal, created by General George Washington in 1782 as the Badge of Military Merit, is the oldest military decoration still awarded today to those who have sacrificed for their country.

Important Military Dates in August and September:

- August 14: V-J Day (Victory over Japan Day), marking the end of WWII, 1945;
- August 28: Veterans Day at the State Fair;
- September 2: Formal surrender of Japan (WWII), a defining close to global war;
- September 11: Patriot Day—America remembers the lives lost in the 2001 attacks and the countless service members called to action in the years that followed;
- September 18: U.S. Air Force Birthday, we recognize the innovation, courage, and service of all who have worn its blue uniform; and
- September 19: POW/MIA Recognition Day, honoring those taken prisoner or missing in action—a reminder to never forget.

In the coming weeks, four South Dakota communities will gather for Fallen Hero Bridge Dedications—living tributes to local sons/daughters whose stories deserve to be known by every traveler:

- August 30: Plankinton (Plankinton School, 404 E Davenport at 1:00 pm CT): Dedication for SP5 Richard Miller reminds us that individual sacrifices from global conflicts echo on our roads.
- September 17, Buffalo (Harding County School, 12474 Tipperary Street at 2:30 pm MT): Dedication for PVT Elmer Albertson. His service is a reminder that every small town has sent forth its best in times of need.

- September 18, Central City (Pizza Lab, 124 US-14A at 1:00 pm MT): Dedication for PFC Peter Ommen. We honor his courage and the loss still felt by family and neighbors.
- September 20, Centerville (American Legion, 621 Main Street at 10:00 am CT): Dedication for PVT Frank Holcombe. His name will forever grace the bridge that connects lives and memories in Turner County.

These ceremonies are part of South Dakota's Fallen Heroes Bridge Dedication Program, launched in 2019 by the Noem-Rhoden Administration with one purpose: to ensure the ultimate sacrifices made by more than 3,000 South Dakota veterans are not forgotten. Each year, the committee meets to select heroes and bridges, and from May through November, the state pauses in gratitude at these dedications.

These dates—and these ceremonies—matter because military history is not just distant dates and foreign battlefields. It's the lives lived with courage, the families who mourn, and the communities who remember. When you see a bridge bearing a hero's name, let it be a prompt to ask about their story, or to share one you know. Attend a ceremony if you can. You will find neighbors, veterans, and families united in respect and gratitude.

Your voice, your hands, and your presence matter. We hope to see you at the various events across our state. In every season, let us never forget.

Jeremiah J. Schneider, Secretary
South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs