Wisconsin's veterans tell the greatest stories of their lives.

WISCONSIN WWII STORIES

Part I - Struggle

Summary

WISCONSIN WWII STORIES

WISCONSIN hi story

WISCONSIN PUBLIC TELEVISION

Wisconsin's veterans tell the greatest stories of their lives.

"We were fortunate enough to be able to see the program last night, and we are waiting for the next part that will be shown November. People should see it to appreciate not only what the veterans have done but to remind them what really happened."

Larry Kubale
Green Bay, glider pilot on D-Day, interviewed for the series

The stories of our state's World War II veterans disappear by the day.

Recognizing the need to hear those voices before they go silent, *Wisconsin World War II Stories* has been chronicling the veterans' firsthand view of history.

The landmark project – a partnership of the **Wisconsin Historical Society** and **Wisconsin Public Television** in association with the **Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs** – is conducting priceless interviews documenting tales of valor and sacrifice, humbly told by a generation that came of age during the defining event of our time.

Response so far is clear.

Wisconsin World War II Stories is right on the mark.

To date, the project, which extends far beyond television, has produced:

- **The first hour-long television program,** "Struggle," with memories from Pearl Harbor to the eve of D-Day. A second episode, coming in November, will cover D-Day through the war's end in Europe. A third installment in May 2004 will encompass the war in the Pacific through V-J Day. The story of the homefront's contribution to the war effort will debut in March 2004.

- **An expansive Web site** at wisconsinstories.org that features: the first episode as streaming video, a transcript, archived audio of veterans' interviews, letters home during the war, extensive bibliographies, written reminiscences, a portrait gallery and more. Many additional World War II stories are coming in from veterans and their families through the Web site.

- **A portrait exhibit** of eight veterans featured in *Wisconsin World War II Stories* traveling to libraries and other sites throughout the state to honor Wisconsin veterans.

WISCONSIN WWII STORIES

WISCONSIN hi story

WISCONSIN PUBLIC TELEVISION

Press Response

"The spellbinding hour is a reminder of how huge and deadly that war was - and how Wisconsin-bred men and women were right in the thick of it from the start."

Warren Gerds
Green Bay Press-Gazette

36

Wisconsin World War II Stories filled with emotion, humility

They helped shape the modern world and pave the way for freedom. They have been hailed as members of America's greatest generation.

But ask Wisconsin's World War II veterans about their experiences, and they are unfailingly humble. Their war memories are moving, yet their stories are couched in terms like "I didn't do anything special" and "We did our jobs the best we could."

The veterans relate what they experienced and how it changed their lives in Wisconsin World War II Stories, a new documentary premiering at 8 p.m. Monday, May 12, on Wisconsin Public Television (WPT). The program will have an encore broadcast at 8:30 p.m. Sunday, May 25.

More than 50 veterans have been interviewed for the Wisconsin World War II Stories project, a production of the Wisconsin Historical Society and WPT in association with the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs. The first hour-long program uses 16 of those interviews, with memories from Pearl Harbor to D-Day.

A second episode, coming in November, will cover D-Day through the war's end.

Press attention to *Wisconsin World War II Stories* and the veterans is unprecedented for a Wisconsin Public Television production.

Here is a sampling:

Joanne Weintraub, Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel: "As straightforward as its title, 'Wisconsin World War II Stories' presents the testimony of 16 state veterans whose memories of Pearl Harbor, D-Day and points between still inspire awe."

Dean Robbins, Isthmus, Madison: "…Wisconsin veterans share their memories in this marvelous documentary… . (The veterans) emerge as a quietly heroic bunch, unwilling to make too big a deal of their combat experiences."

Lead editorial, Marshfield News-Herald: "This is important. …Watching the WPT broadcast together as a family would be a good jumping off point. It'll spark a lot of discussion. …History that's not recorded is history lost."

Janesville Gazette: "Wisconsin veterans share their experience and how they changed their lives in *Wisconsin World War II Stories* … The frenzy, horror and devastation… resonate in each man's story, and their emotions remain powerful and poignant more than 60 years later."

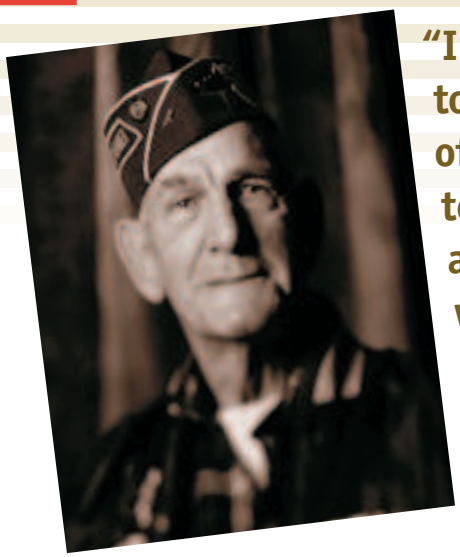
The Wisconsin State Journal highlighted the program on its TV Week cover. Feature articles on Wisconsin World War II Stories also appeared in the Ripon Commonwealth Press, the Green Bay News-Chronicle, the Portage Daily Register, the Marinette Eagle Herald and the Tomah Journal, among other papers.

WISCONSIN WWII STORIES

WISCONSIN hi story

WISCONSIN PUBLIC TELEVISION

Viewer Response



"I feel very honored to have been chosen to take part, along with 49 other veterans of this war. ... It is important that this terrible, tragic war never be forgotten, and we vets who fought it can best tell what happened. It is nothing like the movies."

Jim Magruder
Peshtigo, 8th Air Force, B-17 Ball Turret Gunner, POW

From Madison to Park Falls, from Milwaukee and Green Bay to La Crosse and Eau Claire, viewers tuned in to watch the premiere of *Struggle*. Nearly 65,000 viewers bypassed stiff competition from network television to catch *Wisconsin World War II Stories*.

Viewer response to *Wisconsin World War II Stories* has been overwhelmingly positive.

"I watched the *Wisconsin World War II Stories* program and was really touched by the people who spoke and told their stories. My dad was in WWII and served in the North Atlantic on a minesweeper. I can only imagine how frightening that would have been both for him and for his parents and fiance. It never occurred to me to ask about his war experiences when I was younger, and now it's too late, as he has been gone a long time."
Donna Nemec, Washburn

"The WWII stories are most interesting ... and moving. ... My mother's uncle spent years in the war, and was at Normandy. I have seen the letters and written accounts he has saved from his war days. He has since passed, but his accomplishments and bravery live on in all we take for granted in our daily lives. Your show is a testament to what was endured for those at home. Thank you." **Tracey Ducat, Appleton**

WISCONSIN WWII STORIES

WISCONSIN hi story

WISCONSIN PUBLIC TELEVISION

Viewer Response 2

"I would like to commend WPT for the recent program regarding our WWII veterans. I am the son of a veteran of the battles of Saipan, Leyte and Okinawa."

"I watched your program *Wisconsin World War II Stories* this past Sunday. I was thrilled to see you had information on the 32nd Red Arrow Division. My late father was a medic in that division, and my husband and I are always searching for more information about the Red Arrow Division. We were curious if you could help us get even more information. Thank you." **Victoria**

"I have a son serving as a combat medic whose enlistment has been indefinitely extended for the duration of Operation Freedom and, yeah, I appreciate it. I enjoyed the programming on Sunday night, Memorial Day weekend. I support any additional programming along the same lines."

WISCONSIN WWII STORIES

WISCONSIN hi story

WISCONSIN PUBLIC TELEVISION

Beyond Broadcast

"*Wisconsin World War II Stories* is the perfect complement to the work we are doing in the classroom and in the community. ... The format of sequencing veterans' stories engages students and provides segments that are easily transferable to classroom use. ...A unique and valuble service that will have an educational impact for generations to come."

Jim Bokern
social studies teacher, Marshfield High School

• **Well-received screenings** were held to honor many of the veterans, including events at the Governor's Executive Residence, featuring a salute from Gov. Jim Doyle; Marshfield; St. Norbert College, De Pere; Madison; Oshkosh; the Veterans' Home in King; and Janesville.

• **A short follow-up program** to "Struggle" provided veterans and other viewers advice on preserving historic memories. Staff from the Wisconsin Historical Society and Wisconsin Veterans Museum operated a phone bank to provide information on preserving and donating historic photographs, documents and artifacts. Ninety-five calls were received after the initial broadcast. More than a quarter of the callers were looking to donate material, and about half of them were looking for ways to preserve memorabilia, conduct research or produce oral histories.

• **The Web site** showed a spike in activity the day after the premiere broadcast as visitors sought more veterans' stories. The rate of Web site-submitted memories for *Wisconsin World War II Stories* far outpace the responses the Wisconsin Stories Web site has received on other topics. Early Web statistics indicate a hunger on the part of the Web-surfing public for information on Wisconsin's World War II veterans and for a forum incorporating their own memories.

WISCONSIN WWII STORIES

WISCONSIN hi story

WISCONSIN PUBLIC TELEVISION

Beyond Broadcast 2

• **A portrait exhibit** of eight of the featured veterans is traveling the state. Staff photographer Jim Gill took the evocative portraits. The exhibit has been scheduled to appear at the Brown County Library, the Veterans Medical Center in Tomah, Marathon County Public Library in Wausau, La Crosse Public Library and the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay.

• **All of the footage from the veterans' interviews** – 50 of which have been conducted so far – will be archived electronically at the Wisconsin Veterans Museum. This video history will be invaluable to this and coming generations learning about Wisconsin natives who helped win the war.

• **VHS videos** of *Wisconsin World War II Stories: Struggle* are available for purchase from WPT, at the Wisconsin Historical Society and at the Wisconsin Veterans Museum. When the series is completed, it will be made available on DVD.

table-top portrait exhibit - 10′ x 3.5′

WISCONSIN WWII STORIES

WISCONSIN hi story

WISCONSIN PUBLIC TELEVISION

Funders

"The International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers and its statewide Local Unions are proud to pay tribute to the men and women of the World War II generation. ... Their can-do attitude and pride in workmanship in building America in the post-war years continue to inspire us to follow in their footsteps. We value this opportunity to preserve their stories, and remain forever indebted to their legacy of self-sacrifice."

Terry Roover, IBEW

The crucial work of *Wisconsin World War II Stories* has been validated with an outpouring of financial support from businesses, foundations and individuals.

Time is short to capture the veterans' memories. *Wisconsin World War II Stories* is compiling a priceless, irreplaceable resource for generations to come.

Funding for *Wisconsin World War II Stories: Struggle* was provided by the Ho-Chunk Nation; the Wisconsin Local Unions of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers; an advised fund of the Community Foundation of Southern Wisconsin; and Philip J. and Elizabeth B. Hendrickson.

Additional funding was provided by The Evjue Foundation Inc., the charitable arm of The Capital Times; The Boldt Company; Duard and Dorothea Walker; the Hamilton Roddis Foundation; contributors to the Wisconsin Program Fund; and the Dorothy Inbusch Foundation, Milwaukee. Closed captioning was funded by Qual Line Fence Corp.

Donor Dorothea Walker praises the quality of *Wisconsin World War II Stories* and emphasizes the urgency of its mission. "You've got to get those stories now," she says. "If not now, never."