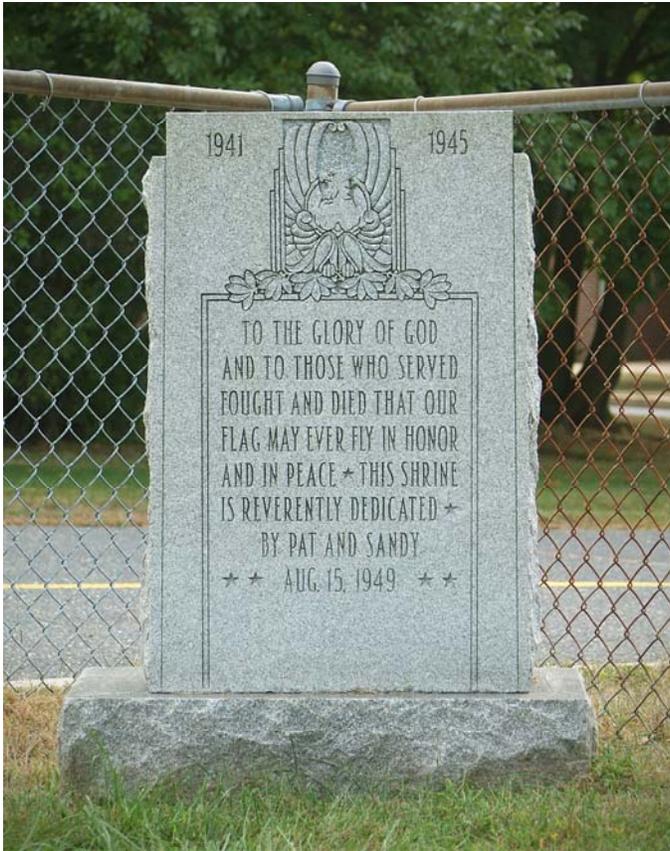


Breslin Memorial Returns to Belmar

By Melissa Ziobro, Command Historian

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Fort Monmouth returned the Breslin War Memorial to the Borough of Belmar on 9 February 2010.



Two private citizens, Pat and Sandy Breslin, originally erected the memorial in 1949 on private property in Belmar. After losing their lease, the memorial sat in storage until coming to its new home at Fort Monmouth in 1961.

Pat and Sandy Breslin used their Belmar marine basin boating and fishing concession on Route 35 to support the morale, welfare, and recreation of troops for sixteen years (1941- 1957).

It all started the day after the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor. The Breslins declared their 150 boats, fishing equipment, dock and food free to anyone in uniform, “regardless of race, color, or creed.” The couple often allowed servicemen and women to phone their families at no cost. Many of these young Soldiers served at Fort Monmouth.

When asked in 1954 how they could afford to provide this kind of support, Pat and Sandy explained, “We’ve got a good business. We’ll never be rich, but you couldn’t buy our civilian customers. They’re loyal to us and hope that others show consideration to their friends and relatives in the service somewhere else.”

Pat and Sandy paid special attention to convalescents, hosting regional hospital outings that dedicated the use of their facilities to wounded warriors on certain days of the week.

A 1954 *Monmouth Message* newspaper article noted that Pat and Sandy “have been credited with healing the broken bones, spirits, and hearts of countless thousands in their morale building work.”

The couple gained some notoriety for their efforts. They received the American flag that flew over the Capitol on D-Day; visited with President Eisenhower in 1953; and received a medal from Archbishop of New York and Apostolic Vicar for the U.S. Armed Forces Francis Joseph Cardinal Spellman in 1954. They garnered mention in the Congressional Record in recognition of their efforts to better the morale of servicemen. Sandy Breslin received the first orchid ever sent out on the “Breakfast in Hollywood” radio show. The couple even appeared on the television shows “Journey through Life” and “Wheel of Fortune.”

But the Breslins did not need praise or prizes. As the Hon. James C. Auchincloss (Rep. NJ) said in a speech to the House of Representatives on May 25, 1945:

“Pat and Sandy practice practical patriotism. They do not wear their patriotism on their sleeve; it is deeply entrenched in their hearts and they are setting us all an example as to what we should do to make this country a better place.”

The Breslins themselves said that they could do without Government citations or even praise from the President himself. They claimed as their real rewards the thousands of letters they received from men on virtually every battlefield in the world.

Photos of these men covered the walls of the Breslins’ building in a “GI Hall of Fame” that knew no rank. A photograph of a paraplegic man fishing from a Red Cross wheelchair reportedly flanked an autographed picture of President Eisenhower.

Sandy told the *Monmouth Message* in 1954, “We promised the War Department in 1941 that the free service for GIs would last thru the duration...We just haven’t decided when the duration is going to end.”

The duration ended in April 1957 when the Breslins lost their lease. Their building was later demolished. The couple lamented their loss, but they especially feared the fate of the war memorial they had erected in 1949 in honor of the servicemen who visited them but did not return. A local store volunteered to house the memorial without charge. Then, the Breslins contacted President Eisenhower. Eisenhower contacted the Department of Defense, which contacted the Army.

Fort Monmouth Commander Maj. Gen. William D. Hamlin agreed to have the memorial placed here. A dedication ceremony occurred on April 25, 1961. The memorial remained here, just outside the Community Center (Building 552).

The fate of all the monuments and memorials on Fort Monmouth is currently being decided by a U.S. Army Fort Monmouth Garrison-led Memorial Council. The Breslin memorial is the first to leave the base before its September 2011 closure.

Belmar has been expressing interest in the Breslin memorial for years. For example, Patricia Melango of the Belmar Historical Council said in 2008, “Belmar has an ongoing marina renovation and will be constructing on the same pier area that was once occupied

by Pat and Sandy. Our Belmar Historical Council would love to see the monument replaced in that area.”

