

Washburn veterans remembered-

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Civil War 1861-1865—
Spanish-American War
1898

From its founding in the fall of 1883 to 1975 Washburn sent its young men off to five wars: Spanish-American War 1898, World War I 1917-1918, World War II 1941-1945, Korean War 1950-1953, and the Viet Nam War 1961-1975. A few returned to the somber strains of the last bugle call, while their more fortunate comrades came home to devote their lives to making Washburn a better place to live. With "Flags Furl'd Last Time For Vets," recently reported in the County Journal, it is appropriate to remember the contributions of these men.

While Washburn did not exist during the Civil War, at least eight veterans of that conflict lived in Washburn, if only briefly. Two of them were long-time residents of the city, making significant contributions to community life. William O'Neil enlisted in the Union Army when he was only 13 years old and participated in several major battles. About 1880 he moved to Washburn to engage in the mercantile business. He was elected chairman of the Town of Washburn Board for three terms, and served two terms

in the Wisconsin Assembly, followed by two in the Senate. He died in 1917. David Monroe was the last and best



known of Washburn's Civil War veterans. He enlisted in the Union Army when he was 16 years old. He participated in several battles and was with the first regiment to enter Richmond, Virginia, the Confederate capital, as the war drew to a close. After the war he engaged in a variety of occupations and about 1903 he moved to Washburn, working as a timber cruiser and participating in town and county government. As he grew older he became something of a folk hero, with his birthday a community event. At age 91 he traveled by train to Gettysburg for a reunion of the Grand Army of the Republic, the organization of Union veterans. He died in March 1945, a few weeks after celebrating his 98th birthday.

The Spanish-American War,

called "a splendid little war," was little, lasting only from April to August 1898, but was certainly not splendid. The people of Washburn, or at least some of them, were caught up in the enthusiasm for war against Spain to liberate Cuba and its other colonies, whipped up by war hawks and by big city newspapers engaged in a circulation battle. Men from Washburn and a few from Ashland and Bayfield, organized a volunteer company in June 1898 under the leadership of William O'Neil, the Civil War veteran, who served as captain. Isaac H. Wing of Bayfield, an affluent benefactor of that community and Washburn, donated blue flannel shirts to the men and in gratitude they named their company the "Wing Guards." On June 29th the company departed by train for Camp Douglas in southwestern Wisconsin amidst the cheers of 4,000 people assembled at the depot, accompanied by fireworks and band music. At Camp Douglas the company was inducted into federal service as Company K of the Fourth Wisconsin Volunteer Regiment, and the men were introduced to military discipline. In early August they were visited by a special excursion of relatives and

friends from Washburn. The Fourth Regiment was still at Camp Douglas when the war ended in August, but rather than being mustered out it was sent to Anniston, Alabama. Unfortunately, the men soon became victims of the incompetence and poor planning of the Army, suffering from disease, inadequate clothing and poor food. Two men in Company K died but apparently they were not from Washburn. The company was finally discharged, the men arriving in Washburn on March 3 1899 to a rousing welcome. John Wannebo, a member of the company, later re-enlisted in the regular army. He was killed by rebels while serving in the Philippines, which the United States had acquired from Spain as a fruit of its victory. His body was returned to Washburn for burial in September 1903. The returning soldiers did not form a Spanish-American War veterans' organization, although they were active in patriotic celebrations on July 4th and Memorial Day for many years.

Editors Note: This is the first in a series of history columns by Mr. Larson to be continued in upcoming issues.