

THE BRISTOL EDITION

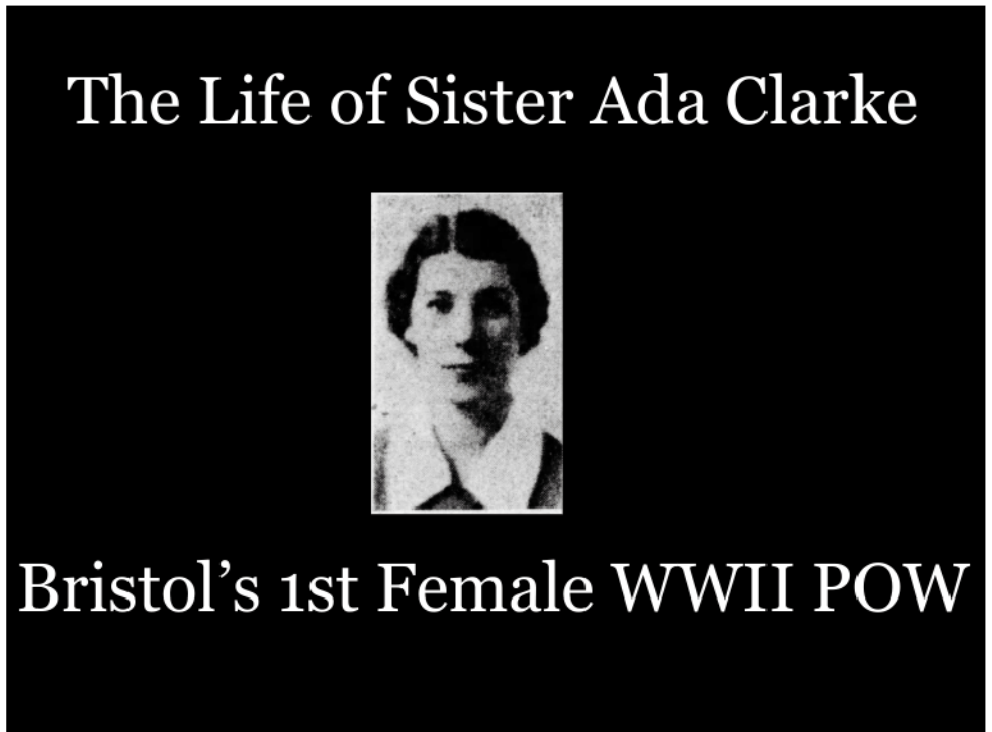
GUEST ESSAY, TBE SUNDAY

Guest essay: Time for monument to Bristol's military women



by [Carol Denehy](#)

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One of the Memorial Military Museum programs that includes Bristol's first female WW II POW. | Facebook screenshot

There are moments in a community's history when we must ask ourselves a simple but important question: Have we honored everyone who answered the call to serve?

For Bristol, the answer is clear. It's time.

It is time to recognize the generations of Bristol women who have proudly worn our nation's uniform—those who served in the past, those who serve today, and the young women who will rise to serve tomorrow. The

Memorial Military Museum seeks to do just that with a monument dedicated to Bristol's military women on Veterans Memorial Boulevard.

The story of Bristol's military women began long before women were welcomed into military careers. Their service was often defined not by opportunity, but by determination.

Sarah E. Reynolds left the classroom to serve as a nurse during the Civil War, caring for wounded soldiers at a time when women's contributions were too often overlooked. During World War I, Mary McCarthy served as a nurse in France and was so inspired by her wartime experience that she joined the military when the war ended. Their patriotism reminds us that when America called, Bristol women answered—even when they were not always invited to serve.

For much of our nation's history, women were largely excluded from military service opportunities and barred from the all-male service academies that educated the career officers who would lead our armed forces. Yet women persevered and continued to prove their capabilities and commitment to our country.

A historic turning point came in 1976 when President Gerald Ford signed legislation opening the United States service academies to women. From that moment forward, young women in Bristol's high schools could dream differently. They could accept their own Call to Duty.

And they did.

Bristol's daughters have proudly earned appointments to the United States Coast Guard Academy and West Point. An historic moment occurred in February 1976, when Bristol Central High School senior, Cathryn Lis, was one of the first three women accepted to the US Naval Academy. Also notably, three Bristol sisters graduated from the United States Air Force Academy—an extraordinary achievement that reflects the character, courage, and determination found within our community.

These stories deserve to be seen. They deserve to be remembered.

Some may ask, "Why a monument?" The answer is simple: monuments are not frozen in time. They are living reminders of who we are and what we value. They tell future generations whose shoulders they stand upon.

For time immemorial, Bristol has come together to honor its own. Veterans Memorial Boulevard is more than a beautiful parkway. It is sacred ground where our community pauses to remember sacrifice and service. When we stand before a monument on our peaceful Boulevard park, it may appear inert in stone, yet it speaks across generations.

Its timeless message resonates in every American heart:

“All gave some. Some gave all.”

A monument invites us to reflect on the courage and selflessness of those who served. It calls us to express our gratitude—not only for their sacrifices, but for the freedoms we enjoy because they were willing to answer their nation’s call.

But monuments are about more than honoring the past. They help shape the future.

Imagine a young girl walking Veterans Memorial Boulevard with her family. She pauses before the monument and asks who are these women. In that simple question begins a conversation about courage, sacrifice and service. She learns that women from her own hometown answered their nation’s call throughout history. She begins to understand that service is not bound by gender or generation. She sees herself reflected in their courage and realizes that she, too, can serve something greater than herself.

That is the true power of a monument.

The Memorial Military Museum Project’s monument will stand not only for the women whose names we know today, but also for those who will someday answer the call. It will honor every Bristol woman who has served and every young woman who has yet to discover that service may one day become her own life’s mission.

The women of Bristol have served with honor. They have earned their place in our community’s story and on Veterans Memorial Boulevard.

The time for recognition has arrived. A monument is not built by stone alone. It is built by a community that believes that every generation of service deserves to be remembered. Today the Memorial Military Museum invites you to become of that legacy.

We have partnered with Main Street Community Foundation to accept donations for this project. This will help our organization account for every dollar raised and spent in a transparent way.

To make an online donation: <https://www.mainstreetfoundation.org/BristolMilitaryMonument>

To mail a check: Main Street Community Foundation, PO Box 2702, Bristol, CT 06011-2702

Thank you from the women who served, are serving and will serve.

It's Their Time.

Editor's note: The writer is the vice president of the Memorial Military Museum and official board liaison between the museum and the Bristol Historical Society.