



DALE REICH

Honoring Veterans Who Once Lived Among Us

BY DALE REICH

Millions of veterans' gravestones are in need of cleaning. These markers—often the only remaining representation of the service rendered by self-sacrificing men and women—have been rendered unreadable by dirt, lichens, algae, and grass clippings. As a result, the final visual tribute paid to these veterans has been lost to their families, their communities, and their country.

I became interested in cleaning these grave markers after cleaning that of my grandfather, a World War I veteran disabled by mustard gas, and my grandmother. Both are buried near my hometown of Oconomowoc, Wisc. Since 2017 I have cleaned the markers of 1,150 veterans and their spouses. I clean the spouses' gravestones because they most certainly share the burden that comes with military service, especially its aftermath.

I encourage VVA chapters to enlist service clubs, schools, and other organizations into this positive endeavor that combines patriotism and education into a classic community

cleanup project. It requires almost no money and is safe and doable for children and adults. It's amazing what a few minutes of scrubbing with a nylon brush, a few drops of Dawn detergent, and a little elbow grease can accomplish.

Imagine the things that children can learn by literally uncovering significant local history in their own community. As a retired history teacher, I can't think of a more meaningful lesson. ■

