

American Legion Post 1247 recently dedicated a WWII Illinois historical marker to celebrate the 100th anniversary of The American Legion. The post wanted to create a unique project that not only celebrated the Legion's anniversary, but also respected the past sacrifices of veterans in war and let our community know its part in a unique story of our nation's history. More importantly, Post 1247 wanted to bring this story to the young students of Vernon Hills so they would have a better appreciation of the sacrifices made on their behalf by Americans who came before them. The post chose a little-known historical event – namely, a Navy airfield located at Vernon Hills High School's athletic fields that trained Navy pilots for aircraft-carrier qualification landings during World War II. The Illinois State Historical Society certified the project. Additionally the school administration of Vernon Hills High School and students warmly supported our efforts. The Village of Vernon Hills did the physical installation of the marker, which is 4 by 5 feet. It was a great project funded by the post, and was well-received by the community. Shortly after the dedication, the post color guard presented the colors for the national anthem at the Vernon Hills High School varsity football game.

As mentioned, the project highlights a little known piece of World War II history regarding the training of Naval aviators to qualify to land on aircraft carriers. The training program on Lake Michigan included two aircraft carriers, USS Wolverine and USS Sable. These ships were car ferries that were converted to aircraft carriers. The headquarters was at NAS Glenview and the main auxiliary field was at Vernon Hills. When the high school was built in the late '90s, the runways were torn up and state-of-the-art athletic fields took their place. This training program resulted in 17,820 pilots becoming aircraft-carrier qualified, and its graduates played a significant role in our victory over the Axis powers. Many a famous pilot trained, here including at the time the youngest pilot in the Navy, 18-year-old George H.W. Bush, future president of the United States. The ground on where this airfield once stood now trains young Americans to become citizens of our nation, whereas 76 years ago it trained young Americans for war.

