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U.S.'s first hero of World War II a Floridian

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MADISON ---- America's first hero of World War II --- Captain Colin P. Kelly, Jr. --- is permanently honored by a beautiful statue which stands in the city park of his home town of Madison. The "Four Freedoms Memorial" may be seen by thousands of motorists daily who drive by the park on U.S. 90.

Three days after Pearl Harbor in the dark days of the war in 1941, Kelly brought hope to a nation in despair as he gallantly led a B-17 mission to bomb a Japanese warship in the Pacific. Returning to base, his bomber was attacked by Jap fighters and the North Florida flier went down in flames.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt awarded Kelly posthumously the Distinguished Service Cross and other medals. FDR also wrote to "the President in 1956," asking that Captain Kelly's son, "Corky", be given a Presidential appointment to West Point. The son grew up and President Eisenhower in 1959 did offer the appointment, but young Kelly took a competitive exam and went to the Academy, which was the Alma Mater of his Dad.

The "Four Freedoms Memorials" was dedicated on Flag Day, 1944, by Governor Spessard L. Holland.

The Kelly monument stands near a Confederate memorial, honoring veterans of another war. Captain Kelly's body lies in Oak Ridge cemetery in Madison. Another local recognition is the gymnasium at North Florida Junior College, named in honor of Captain Kelly.