

Memorial Day



By Paul Engel

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- Memorial Day is when we as a nation honor those who died in the service of their country.
- Memorial Day has become the beginning of the summer season.
- Don't we owe those who gave the last full measure of devotion more than parades and cookouts?

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.—That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed,

[Declaration of Independence](#)

Are you wondering why am I quoting the Declaration of Independence for a holiday other than Independence Day? It is because one of our nation's most important holidays is often treated as nothing more than the beginning of summer. That does a disservice to all who have sacrificed so much to secure our rights.

Today it seems most people think the government is there to keep us safe. However, as the Declaration of Independence states, we create governments to secure our rights.

Government Issued

During World War I, buckets, trash cans, and other metal items issued by the military were stamped with the letters "G.I." Some think this stood for "General Issue," but I lean towards the term "Government Issue." It didn't take long before soldiers were referred to as "GIs". What does all this have to do with Memorial Day?

Think back to the Declaration of Independence: "to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men." When government sends out troops, be they federal military or state militia, their primary goal should be to secure our rights. Every one of them takes an oath, which includes:

"I, _____, do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; and that I will obey the orders of the President of the United States and the orders of the officers appointed over me, according to regulations and the Uniform Code of Military Justice. So help me God."

[10 USC 502: Enlistment oath](#)

Yes, they protect us from invasion, punish those who've attacked us, and frequently project foreign policy, but if their actions are legitimate this is done to protect the unalienable rights of people, both home and abroad. During these engagements, and sometimes while training for them, some of these brave men and women die in the service of their country. They gave their lives to secure to us our rights. Don't you think that's worth a little recognition?

History of Memorial Day

Decoration Day was first observed on May 30, 1868, to honor those who had died during the Civil War. May 30th was chosen because it was not the anniversary of any Civil War battle. It was a day when grateful people would decorate the graves of

those who had fallen during the war. Then, in 1971, it was made a federal holiday to honor all military personnel who died in service and renamed Memorial Day. Although a disappearing celebration, some cities and towns still hold parades and decorate the graves of veterans on this day.

One national celebration of Memorial Day people may have heard of is the Indianapolis 500 race. This annual race has been held the Sunday before Decoration/Memorial Day since its first running in 1912. This includes pre-race events, many of them patriotic and honoring of the fallen.

Because Memorial Day is the last Monday in May, it has become the unofficial beginning of the summer season. Celebrated with cook-outs and other family get togethers, it seems fewer and fewer people are focused on the honoring of those who died to secure their rights and instead are enjoying their cook-outs and planning for summer vacations.

Honoring More Than the Fallen

There are still plenty of Americans who remember the fallen on Memorial Day, but are they the only ones who have sacrificed to secure our rights? There are plenty of people injured, both physically and mentally from combat, and we should remember them as well. However, the group that often sacrifices the most yet gets the least recognition are the families: The mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, wives, husbands, daughters, and sons that are left behind. Yes, there are those who support them, and programs to assist them, but there is no day set aside to remember the sacrifices they have made.

We have Veterans Day in November, when we remember all who served, but how often do we remember those who served and supported the veteran? How often are the families remembered? Sure, when death visits them, there are friends and neighbors who offer condolences, bring food, and offer a shoulder to cry on, but what happens after that? Who takes up the role of

father, and in some cases mother, after the ceremonies are over? Who invites the sons and daughters to join them in the Memorial Day Parade? Who prays with the widow, not just during their darkest hours, but when the day to day gets to be too much?

Yes, we should all remember and honor those who sacrificed their lives to secure our rights, but I think we owe them more than an annual parade. I think we owe taking care of their families as well.

Conclusion

Although pre-dating Decoration Day, on June 1, 1863, President Abraham Lincoln gave what became known as the “Gettysburg Address”. Among those few and powerful words, some should ring all the louder on this Memorial Day.

that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion – that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain – that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom – and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.

[The Gettysburg Address](#)

In this brief yet powerful speech, President Lincoln gave us a clarion call and a way to honor those who sacrificed to secure our rights. We should honor their sacrifices by resolving to continue what they died for, that we work to bring an ever new birth of freedom to this nation, and that we insure that our governments serve the people, not that the people serve the government. Finally, that the United States once again becomes the home of the brave, so it can remain the land of the free.

Let us take President Lincoln’s admonition for those 7,000 dead and 51,000 wounded, and honor the approximately 1.3

million service men and women that have given the last full measure of devotion in war to secure our rights. Not just this year, but each and every Memorial Day as long as we live. And while we're at it, let us not forget the families whose pain and sacrifice continue while their loved ones are laid to rest. I can think of no better way to honor the dead, than to do our best to support those they left behind.

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