

Memorial Day

Contributed by Skywalker
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Editors note: This weeks guest rant was again submitted by a former Marine who happens to be a good friend of mine. If you'd like to submit a guest rant for this site drop me a message in the message boards and I'll get back to you with instructions on how to do so.

When you ask Americans what Memorial Day means to them, it often appears that the day to remember our fallen takes on a different significance. For many, Memorial Day weekend mainly marks the first long vacation weekend of the year and another mega sales opportunity. Quite possibly the recent controversy over publicly showing pictures of flag-draped cases of American war casualties of the Iraq War could have sensitized the national conscience in a very timely manner.

Like it or

not, coffins, white crosses and gravestones are sober reminders of what Memorial Day and war are all about – to remember and honor those who've died for America! Memorial Day was officially proclaimed on May 5, 1868 by General John Logan, then national commander of the Grand Army of the Republic, and was first observed on May 30, 1868. On that day, in remembrance of all fallen soldiers of the Civil War, flowers were placed on the graves at Arlington National Cemetery. On Memorial Day 2004, on countless cemeteries across the nation and across the seas, Americans and friends of America will honor fallen comrades and loved ones. These fallen made the ultimate sacrifice for their country, their families, their God, various personal beliefs, and trusting that their cause was just. When reading first-hand accounts of combat and reflecting on my own Marine experiences, I quickly realize once again that war isn't an exciting adventure. No, war isn't only about heroism and glory but mainly about suffering, hardships and ultimately death – civilian and military.

Nonetheless, war remains a part of human intercourse, even in our civilized 21st century. Yes, although despicable, war is sometimes a necessary evil to spur human evolution. America's soldiers and especially the World War II generation have demonstrated that it was possible to accomplish just that – to conclude a major war with a balanced peace and successful reconstruction. For their accomplishments in war and the creation of a lasting peace, that generation has been rightfully recognized with a splendid memorial on the National Mall in Washington, D.C. that will be dedicated on Saturday, May 29. But while focusing on honoring the fallen and the accomplishments of our World War II generation, we cannot forget the men and women who have willingly carried on in the tradition of their fathers and mothers since then. That includes those who joined America's ideals from other lands, to earn the right to become fellow citizens. They too gave it their all, believing we committed them for just causes in Korea, Vietnam, Grenada, Panama, Desert Storm, the Balkans, Somalia, Afghanistan and Iraq.

As we commemorate the sacrifice of all fallen Americans, I sense that their crosses and markers remind us that besides caring for their graves, we have other, unfulfilled responsibilities. These include caring for the sick, wounded, and needy veterans, while they still have a life to live. The crosses and grave markers furthermore alert us that veterans and patriotic citizens must unite and take political responsibility on issues with impact on our society and the world, such as war, peace, health care, national values, and eroding job benefits. The dead silently prod us to alert us to our citizen duty to remind our political and military leaders what consequences their decisions could have on our children and us, especially since it is usually our young who fight and sacrifice in war. More political awareness and involvement can only help to find more visionary policy choices for our nation and hopefully reduce war to a last-resort option.

On Memorial Day 2004, I will stand with you to salute all warriors who have given their lives, believing that our nation sent them to fight for a righteous cause. Let their sacrifice not have been in vain, but help create a better and more peaceful world for future generations.