



Meaning of Memorial Day



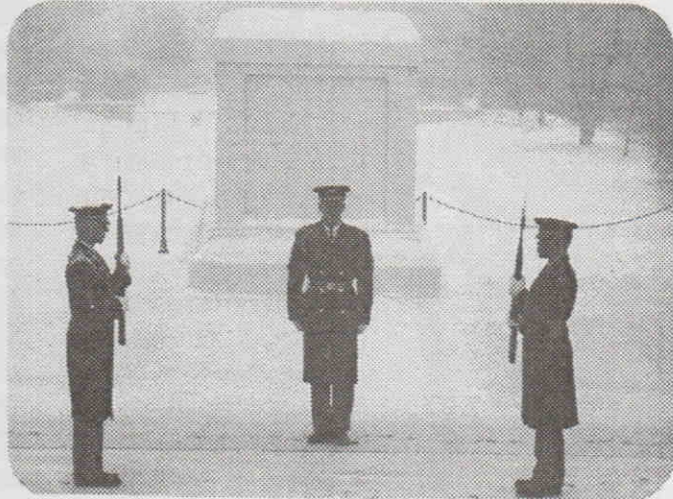
Memorial Day, May 30 (traditional) or May 28 (this year's Congressional designation) is a day of "National Mourning." All U.S. Flags should be displayed at half-staff during the morning hours. At noon, they should be raised back to full-staff.

It's a sacred day to all war veterans: None need to be reminded of the reason why Memorial Day must be commemorated. But what about the general public, and more importantly, future generations? Do most non-veterans really recognize the importance of Memorial Day?

Why Remember? Sacrifice is meaningless without remembrance. America's collective consciousness demands that all citizens be aware of and recall on special occasions the deaths of their fellow countrymen during wartime.

Far too often, the nation as a whole takes for granted the freedoms all Americans enjoy. Those freedoms were paid for with the lives of others few of us actually knew. That's why they are all collectively remembered on one special day.

This should be regarded as a civic obligation. For this is a national debt that can only be truly repaid by individual Americans. By honoring the nation's war dead, we preserve their memory and thus their service and sacrifice.



How Do We Remember? Means of paying tribute vary. Pausing for a few moments of personal silence is available to everyone.



Attending commemorative ceremonies is the most visible way of demonstrating remembrance: placing flags at gravesites, marching in parades, dedicating memorials and wearing Buddy Poppies are examples.

Whether done individually or collectively, it is the thought that counts. Personal as well as public acts of remembering are the idea. Public displays of patriotism are essential if the notion of remembering war dead is to be instilled in the young.

"Strewing with flowers or otherwise decorating the graves of comrades who died in defense of their country during the late rebellion" became a tradition with the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR), the Union veterans organization that made honoring Civil War dead a civic duty for all citizens. Until 1882, the practice of placing flowers at gravesites was known as Decoration Day.

Think of those who, in Lincoln's words, "gave the last full measure of devotion," and you have some idea of the price of liberty. It has been a terrible price to pay if freedom fails, but a small price indeed if the world can eventually be free.

New York was the first state - in 1873 - to legalize May 30. By 1890, all northern states had followed suit.

Until the National Holiday Act of 1971 (P.L. 90 - 363), Memorial Day was observed each May 30.

Changing the date merely to create three-day weekends has undermined the very meaning of the day. No doubt, this has contributed greatly to the general public's nonchalant observance of Memorial Day.

Perhaps the most profound tribute of all was made on the first national memorial observance in May 1868 by then - Gen. James A. Garfield when he said: "They summed up and perfected, by one supreme act, the highest virtues of men and citizens. For love of country they accepted death, and thus resolved all doubts, and made immortal their patriotism and virtue."