

MEMORIAL DAY SPEECH

By Max Schuermann
at Medford, OK, May 28th 2018

Good morning ladies and gentlemen. Thank you for being here today. I am deeply honored to stand with you on this Memorial Day commemorating the sacrifices of those military men and women who have laid down their lives in service to this nation. On every last Monday in May, we find ourselves reflecting on these men and women who so bravely risked life and limb in the face of grave danger. We remember those who left the comforts of home to fight for us and our freedom----but NEVER RETURNED.

This day-----Memorial Day---Was originally called Decoration Day--- and was established on May 5, 1868 three years after the Civil War ended. The head of an organization of Union veterans—the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR)--established Decoration Day as a time for the nation to decorate the graves of the war dead with flowers. Major General John A. Logan declared that Decoration Day should be observed on May 30th, 1868. It is believed that date was chosen because flowers would be in bloom all over the country. The first large observance was held that year at Arlington National Cemetery across the Potomac River from Washington, D.C.

By the end of the 19th century, Memorial Day ceremonies were being held on May 30th throughout the nation. State legislatures passed proclamations designating the day and the Army and Navy adopted regulations for proper observance at their facilities. It was not until after World War I however, that the day was expanded to honor those who had died in all American wars.

In 1966, Congress and President Lyndon Johnson declared Waterloo, N.Y. The “birthplace” of Memorial Day. In Waterloo, a ceremony on May 5th, 1866 had honored local veterans who had fought in the Civil War. Businesses closed and residents flew flags at half-staff. Supporters of Waterloo's claim say earlier observances in other places were either informal, not community-wide or one-time events.

Finally, in 1971, Memorial Day was declared a national holiday by an act of Congress, though it is still often referred to as Decoration Day. It was then also placed on the last Monday in May, as were some other federal holidays.

Traditional observance of Memorial Day has diminished over the years. Many Americans have forgotten the meaning and traditions of Memorial Day. At many cemeteries, the graves of the fallen are increasingly ignored. While there are towns and cities that still hold Memorial Day parades, many have not held a parade in decades.

To insure the sacrifices of America's fallen heroes are never forgotten, in December 2000, the U.S. Congress passed and the president signed into law the "National Moment of Remembrance Act", creating the White House Commission on the National Moment of Remembrance. The commission's charter is to "encourage the people of the United States to give something back to their country, which provides them so much freedom and opportunity" by encouraging and coordinating commemorations in the United States on Memorial Day and a National Moment of Remembrance just like we are doing here today.

The National Memorial Day Parade returned to Washington D.C. In 2004 after a nearly 70 year absence, coinciding with the dedication of the World War II memorial. This outpouring of appreciation to the veterans of World War II spilled over to veterans of the more recent conflicts as well. The National Memorial Day Parade is now an annual event organized by the American Veterans Center and Music Celebrations International. On the Thursday before Memorial Day, the 1,200 soldiers of the 3rd U.S. Infantry place small American flags at each of the more than 260,000 gravestones at Arlington National Cemetery. The Boy Scouts and Cub Scouts of St. Louis place flags on the 150,000 graves at Jefferson Barracks National Cemetery and the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts place a candle at each of approximately 15,300 grave sites of soldiers buried at Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Park on Marye's Heights.

The National Memorial Day parade is now an annual event organized by the American Veterans Center and the Music Celebration International.

Memorial Day is no longer limited to honoring only those Americans from the Armed Forces any more. It is also a day for personal remembrance. Families and individuals honor the memories of their loved ones who have died. Church services, visits to the cemetery, flowers on graves or even silent tribute mark the day with dignity. It is a day of reflection.

Remembering and honoring all of your loved ones is as it should be, but also keep in mind the ORIGINAL meaning of the day-----Memorial Day.

C.W. Johnson wrote a poem entitled--"Memorial Day". It states the original meaning of the day very well. I would like to read it to you.

MEMORIAL DAY

By C.W. Johnson

We walked among the crosses
Where our fallen soldiers lay.
And listened to the bugle
As TAPS began to play.
The Chaplain led a prayer
We stood with heads bowed low.
And I thought of fallen comrades
I had known so long ago.
They came from every city
Across this fertile land.
That we might live in freedom
They lie here 'neath the sand.
I felt a little guilty
My sacrifice was small.
I only lost a little time
But these men lost their all.
Now the services are over
For this Memorial Day.
To the names upon these crosses
I just want to say,
Thanks for what you've given
No one could ask for more.
May you rest with God in heaven
From now through evermore.
Thank you so very much for being here –and for honoring by
remembering. God bless you all and God Bless America.