

Memorial Day: Honoring the Brave, Inspiring the Living

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"Freedom is not free," said by the late U.S. Air Force Chief Master Sergeant Paul W. Airey, a Medal of Honor recipient. This statement holds true for the sacrifices that our nation's heroes made to ensure that we enjoy the freedoms we have today. On this Memorial Day, let us pause and reflect on the valor of our brave service members who paid the ultimate price to defend our country and the ideals we hold dear.

Memorial Day is more than just a long weekend or a day off work; it's a time to remember, honor, and celebrate the lives and legacies of the brave men and women who gave their lives in service to our country. Today we'll explore the history and significance of Memorial Day, highlighting the importance of honoring the fallen, and hopefully inspire the living to live their lives with purpose and meaning.

As a medically retired sergeant from the US Army for injuries sustained during my deployment to Operation Iraqi Freedom, I understand first hand the sacrifices that our service members and their families make. I lost 17 friends in our deployment to Iraq, another 19 to Veteran suicide, and 8 more to rare cancers and illnesses caused by burn pits and toxic exposures. That is 44 of the best men and women this nation has to offer, and I'm grateful for the opportunity to share my thoughts and insights on this important occasion.

History of Memorial Day

Memorial Day, originally known as Decoration Day, has its roots in the aftermath of the Civil War. The first Decoration Day was observed on May 30, 1868, when General John A. Logan of the Grand Army of the Republic declared that the day should be set aside to decorate the graves of the Union soldiers who died in the war. By the end of the

19th century, Memorial Day had become a national event, with many states and communities observing the day in various ways.

In 1971, Congress declared Memorial Day a national holiday to be observed on the last Monday in May. This change allowed for a three-day weekend and led to more widespread participation in Memorial Day events.

Over the years, several key milestones and events have helped shape the meaning and significance of Memorial Day. In 1921, the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier was dedicated at Arlington National Cemetery, serving as a symbol of respect and gratitude for all the unnamed soldiers who gave their lives for our country. In 1950, Congress passed a resolution asking all Americans to observe a moment of remembrance at 3:00 p.m. on Memorial Day, known as the National Moment of Remembrance Act. This act encourages Americans to pause and reflect on the sacrifices of our fallen heroes.

Today, Memorial Day is a time to remember and honor the men and women who died while serving in the U.S. Armed Forces. It's a day to pay tribute to their courage, sacrifice, and selflessness. It's also a day to reflect on the importance of freedom and the values that our soldiers fought and died for. As we observe this Memorial Day, let us remember the legacy of our fallen heroes and express our gratitude for their service and sacrifice.

Importance of Memorial Day

Memorial Day matters for many reasons. For the families and friends of fallen heroes, it's a day to remember their loved ones and honor their sacrifice. It's a day to find comfort and support in the company of others who understand their pain and grief. For the nation as a whole, Memorial Day is a reminder of the high price of freedom and the values and ideals that our service members fought and died for.

One of the key values that Memorial Day represents is sacrifice. Our fallen heroes gave their lives for a cause greater than themselves. They put their duty to country and their fellow citizens above their own personal interests and desires. Their sacrifice reminds us that freedom is never free and that we must be willing to defend it at all costs.

Another value that Memorial Day embodies is courage. Our fallen heroes demonstrated incredible bravery and fortitude in the face of danger and adversity. They faced unimaginable challenges and hardships, often in the most difficult and dangerous circumstances. Their courage should inspire us to overcome our own fears and challenges and to strive for greatness.

Patriotism is also an essential value of Memorial Day. Our fallen heroes loved their country deeply and were willing to give everything to protect it. They embodied the best of America - its diversity, its resilience, and its spirit of innovation and progress. Their patriotism reminds us that we are all part of something bigger than ourselves and that we all have a responsibility to contribute to our nation's success.

Memorial Day represents unity. It's a day when Americans from all walks of life come together to honor the fallen and pay tribute to their sacrifice. It's a day when we set aside our differences and celebrate the things that unite us - our shared history, our common values, and our shared commitment to freedom and democracy. It's a day to recommit ourselves to the principles that make our nation great.

Honoring the Brave

On Memorial Day, we have the opportunity to honor the brave men and women who gave their lives for our country. There are many ways to do this, and each one is meaningful and important.

One way to honor the fallen is to visit cemeteries and pay our respects to those who made the ultimate sacrifice. By placing flowers, flags, or other symbols of

remembrance at their graves, we show that we have not forgotten their service and sacrifice. This is a powerful way to connect with the past and to acknowledge the debt of gratitude that we owe to those who have come before us.

Another way to honor the fallen is to attend parades, ceremonies, or other public events that commemorate Memorial Day. These events provide an opportunity to come together as a community and to show our support for our troops and their families. They also serve as a reminder of the values and ideals that our heroes fought and died for, such as freedom, justice, and equality.

Making it a point to talk with veterans and asking about the friends that they lost to war is another meaningful way to honor the brave. It expresses our gratitude and appreciation for their service, while showing that we care about the sacrifices that their friends have made to keep this country free. These conversations can also provide a source of comfort and inspiration to veterans who may still be struggling with the physical, emotional, or psychological toll of their wartime service.

Finally, laying wreaths at memorials or monuments is a powerful way to pay tribute to the fallen and to show our respect for their sacrifice. These acts of remembrance not only honor the brave, but also inspire and uplift the living, by reminding us of the noble causes and aspirations that our heroes fought for. They remind us that we are all part of something bigger than ourselves and that we all have a responsibility to uphold the values and ideals that make our country great. Let us never forget their service and sacrifice, and let us always strive to live up to the ideals that they so valiantly defended.

Inspiring the Living

While Memorial Day is a time to honor the brave men and women who gave their lives for our country, it can also serve as a source of inspiration and motivation for the living. By reflecting on the sacrifices and values of our fallen heroes, we can gain a renewed sense of purpose and meaning in our own lives.

One way that Memorial Day can inspire the living is by reminding us of the importance of service and sacrifice. Veterans and their families have shown us that even in the face of great adversity and loss, it is possible to turn grief into positive action. Many veterans have started charities, mentored youth, or advocated for social justice as a way to honor the memory of their fallen comrades and to make a positive impact on their communities.

For example, the Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS) was founded by a grieving military widow who wanted to create a support network for families who had lost a loved one in service to their country. Today, TAPS provides grief counseling, mentoring, and other resources to more than 90,000 surviving family members, including children of the fallen. Another example is the Travis Manion Foundation, which was created by the family of a fallen Marine, Travis Manion, to inspire veterans and civilians alike to live with character and service. Through programs such as character education, leadership development, and community service, the foundation has empowered thousands of people to make a positive impact in their own lives and in the lives of others.

These stories and many others like them show us that even in the midst of tragedy and loss, it is possible to find meaning and purpose by serving others and by living with integrity and courage. By honoring the brave men and women who gave their lives for our country, we can also honor their legacy by living our own lives with purpose and meaning. Through acts of service, leadership, and courage, we can honor the memory of those who have gone before us and make a positive impact in our own communities and beyond. Let us never forget the sacrifices of our brave men and women, and let us always strive to live up to their example of service and sacrifice.

Conclusion

Today, we have explored the meaning and significance of Memorial Day, and we have seen how it can both honor the brave and inspire the living. We learned about the history of Memorial Day and the key milestones that shaped its evolution into a national holiday. We discussed the importance of Memorial Day, both for the families and friends of the fallen and for the nation as a whole, as a reminder of the values and ideals that our heroes fought and died for. We also saw how Memorial Day can inspire the living by showing us that even in the face of great adversity and loss, it is possible to find meaning and purpose by serving others and by living with integrity and courage.

In conclusion, let us remember that Memorial Day is not just a day off from work or a chance to have a barbecue. It is a solemn occasion to pay tribute to those who made the ultimate sacrifice for our country, and to honor their legacy by living our own lives with purpose and meaning. So, I urge you all to take action this Memorial Day and beyond, by honoring the brave and inspiring the living. Whether it's visiting a cemetery, laying a wreath, attending a parade, volunteering at a veterans' organization, or sharing your own story of service and sacrifice, let us all do our part to honor the memory of our fallen heroes and to make a positive impact in our communities.

As General George S. Patton once said, "It is foolish and wrong to mourn the men who died. Rather, we should thank God that such men lived." Let us be grateful for the brave men and women who gave their lives for our country, and let us strive to live up to their example of service and sacrifice. Thank you.