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## Remembering Those We Have Lost

*Soldier, rest, thy warfare o'er,  
Dream of fighting fields no more.  
Sleep the sleep that knows not breaking,  
Morn of toil, nor night of waking.*

Sir Walter Scott

**Memorial Day** and Labor Day are bookend holidays, marking the beginning and end of the summer holidays in the United States. These three-day weekends traditionally are times for celebration and family outings. Memorial Day began as a memorial for Civil War veterans. It has become both, a National Decoration Day of family graves, and the holiday that opens the summer season. It is celebrated with backyard barbecues, outdoor picnics, and parades. Celebrated in most states on the last Monday in May, Memorial Day is a time to remember the U.S. men and woman who lost their lives serving their country.

Waterloo, New York was recognized by President Lyndon Johnson and both houses of Congress, as the birthplace of Memorial Day because the town decorated the graves of Civil War veterans as early as May 5, 1866. The claim is contested by Boalsburg, Pennsylvania, which claims to have begun the practice of decorating soldier's graves two years earlier than Waterloo. Another source claims that two years after the Civil War, it was southern women in Columbus, Mississippi who decorated the graves of both Confederate and Union men. Nevertheless, sources agree that it was General John A. Logan of the Grand Army of the Republic who designated May 30, 1868,

*" as a day for strewing with flowers or otherwise decorating the graves of comrades who died in defense of their country, and whose bodies now lie in almost every city, village, or hamlet churchyard in the land...It is the purpose of the commander-in-chief to inaugurate this observance with the hope that it will be kept from year to year while a survivor of the war remains to honor the memory of the departed."*

No survivor of that war remains, but the memories of it grow longer. As do our memories of the parades with floats; civic organizations and drum majorettes twirling their batons; lines and lines of young veterans from The Gulf War and the War in Iraq and shorter lines of older men who saw service in the Second World War, the Korean War and Vietnam. As long as there are wars, there will be veterans and casualties. We will still decorate the graves of those men whose bodies came home and remember those who don't.

The custom of placing flowers upon graves is an old one, and exists in many countries. The Greeks had rites called zoai, which were performed over each new grave. If the flowers took root and blossomed on the graves, it meant the souls were sending back the message that they had found happiness. The Roman festival, called Parentalia, or Day of the Fathers, lasted for eight days in February-violets and roses were the special flowers. Whatever the flower, wherever the grave, this placing of flowers upon graves has always seemed the natural thing to do.



Today, most states officially recognize the May Memorial Day as a legal holiday, but it is not celebrated on May 30th in every state. Over time the holiday has expanded to encompass our other national wars. Although Veteran's Day is celebrated as well, Memorial Day has become the most important day of recognition of our armed forces.

Excerpts from:

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Santino, Jack, *All Around The Year*; University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1994.

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