

NATIONAL SPEAKERS' INFORMATION SERVICE

APRIL, 1930

MEMORIAL DAY

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In Memory of Our Fallen Heroes

THROUGHOUT the ages it has been the beautiful custom of mankind to lay aside the duties and cares of every day life at some appointed time during the year, and pause to honor the memory of those who have passed into the great beyond. Among the ancients this observance was held most sacred and was attended with impressive rites and ceremonies. Flowers were scattered on the graves of the dead in profusion and various gifts such as wine, milk, honey, oil, fruit and even the blood of cattle, pigs and black sheep were brought to the tombs and offered up to the spirits of the departed. The peoples of different lands celebrated this festival in their own peculiar manner, often with weird and gruesome ceremonies in keeping with the superstitions and the belief of the times. The onward march of civilization, however, has brought many changes in our form of remembrance to the dead but that same deep love and lofty sentiment with which the custom has always been associated, has been preserved through the centuries and handed down to us for modern expression and interpretation.

The American observance of Memorial Day had an inspiration in a simple but most touching act of tenderness. Two years after the close of the Civil war, according to a news story printed at that time in the New York Tribune, when the leaders of the nation were bending every effort to heal the wounds of that internecine conflict, the women of Columbus, Mississippi, honored the memory of those who had fallen in battle by strewing flowers on the graves of both the Confederate and the Union soldiers. This act of kindness and understanding, impartial and devoid of sectional animosity, struck a responsive chord in the very heart of a nation so lately divided in mortal combat. Francis Miles Finch was inspired to write his memorable lyric, "The Blue and the Gray." The news of what the women of the South had done spread to the North where it aroused a strong feeling of sympathy for the sorrows common to both and made to soften the hatreds engendered by the war. The incident produced further practical results in 1868 when the Union veterans inaugurated the custom of decorating the graves of their comrades on May 30th. This plan met with wide approval and state after state designated it as a legal holiday. Memorial Day is now generally observed in the North and West on the 30th of May, but is observed on different dates in some of the Southern states.

It was thus, through a noble deed of remembrance tinged with sweet compassion, that America has set aside a day to honor its illustrious dead. The American people take advantage of the opportunity Memorial Day affords to keep green the graves of their loved ones, but they will always regard it as a day essentially reserved to pay tribute to the valor and sacrifice of those who died on the battlefields in the service of their country. The occasion is one of the most beautiful, one of the most significant in the whole year. Precious memories of our fallen brave cluster around this day and the affectionate remembrance thereof brings forth, as nothing else can do, all of the sentiment and appreciation that swells and throbs within the breast of a great and thankful nation. The cemeteries of the land where our war dead rest in eternal peacefulness, are magnificent shrines of patriotism, sublime in their grandeur, and before them we kneel to rechristen our faith in America and gather from their imperishable example a renewed inspiration to also serve.

We have met here today to pay homage and to honor in our humble way, those gallant figures who believed in America, its ideals and institutions, and who placed upon the altar of sacrifice the dearest of all possessions, that of life itself. Mere words are ineffective to describe the greatness of such patriotism. What they have done for the nation is written in the enduring pages of glory and nothing we may say can exalt it to further heights. Their valor and manliness will forever shine as a beacon to light the way to new fields of progress and dispel the sinister shadows that may lurk in the future of America's well being. These heroes, like the men and women gathered here, once enjoyed the vigor and fullness of life but today they sleep in the nation's cemeteries unmindful of the woe and the anguish which was their lot to bear.

The head stones that stand lone guard over their countless tombs are mute, yet from those numberless graves there comes a silence which speaks forth in a most eloquent language. It is a ringing message of patriotism to every American citizen, a command and yet a supplication, for us to remember our individual duties and obligations to the flag, an entreaty that we ever remain loyal and unswerving in our devotion to the great Republic for which they fought and died.

(MORE)

AMERICANISM

Let's make Memorial Day

Memorial Day is held especially dear among the members of The American Legion because it recalls to their minds a personal experience with war. It brings back with an ever increasing vividness the strife and turmoil of armed conflict and it revives memories of the physical sacrifice many of their comrades made for the preservation of American liberty. The grass is green today along the Marne and the Meuse. The cannons of death have long since been removed and the elements have erased many of the battle scars of a dozen years ago. But here and there along what was once the Western Front may be found the grave of an American soldier who was left to sleep where he fell in the defense of his country. Thousands of others are buried in the American cemeteries of France where rows of white crosses, beautiful in their simplicity, keep vigil with the departed spirits of the nation's warriors and stand as elegant monuments to commemorate the gallantry of each and every one. To them the people of America owe an everlasting debt of gratitude which they will never be able to fully repay.

Time is a great healing agency and now that nearly a dozen years have passed, removing much of the sting and the remorse of the World war, it is especially fitting that this year the Gold Star mothers and the widows left in the wake of the war, will have an opportunity to go overseas and visit the graves of their loved ones. The United States Government has given recognition to the loyal women of the nation who suffered and who lost so much through the war, by arranging for them without cost, a series of tours to Europe. The American Legion was in favor of this movement and it urged the enactment of legislation by Congress to make it possible. These tours have now begun and will be conducted during the summer months of this year and of the next three succeeding years. The pilgrimage will be made in small groups and Congress has provided for every convenience on board the ships and during the two weeks' stay on the continent. It is the hope of the Legion that every eligible Gold Star mother and widow will take advantage of the privilege to make the trip which in itself is a fine tribute to the memory of those who served with the greatest of distinction.

Conceived out of the common interests of those who served, and dedicated to that spirit of comradeship which we knew and loved so well in the dark days of the war, The American Legion is striving today to translate the service its members gave in time of war into further usefulness to the nation in time of peace. One of the high purposes of Legionnaires everywhere is to cherish the memory of those comrades who will nevermore be permitted to answer earthly roll call, those who in the words of Lincoln "gave their last full measure of devotion." But the Legion also recognizes that it has a duty to perform to the living, those who did return to answer roll call but on whom the war left marks of physical sacrifice and suffering. There are to be found today in the hospitals of the land, men with broken health, some maimed and wounded for life, who must fight every day to overcome war-incurred disabilities. The American Legion, composed of nearly 800,000 men and women who served in a military capacity in the World war, has for its most important work the rehabilitation of those who were disabled by their war service. It has always been the one activity nearest the hearts of all Legionnaires and it will continue to be until every disabled veteran has been accorded justice and given every benefit within the power of a grateful government to bestow. The Legion's great objective now and in future years is to see that every disabled man is awarded all of the compensation due him from the government, that he is given the best of medical care and attention and receives every opportunity to rehabilitate himself and to regain a useful place in society.

The American Legion is thoroughly alive today to the constantly increasing importance of its rehabilitation service. More than eleven years has passed since our men laid down the weapons of war, but strange as it may seem to the uninformed, the number of disabled veterans has been steadily increasing, instead of decreasing, which would appear at first glance to be the logical development. Many veterans have carried on for several years apparently in good health, and then have broken under the strain imposed by their war service. The task of the Legion is to see that these men are properly hospitalized and that they receive all of the compensation and every consideration to which they are entitled by reason of their disabilities. Soon after it was organized the Legion inaugurated a systematic program to aid the disabled, forming a National Rehabilitation Committee which has been the agency through which thousands of veterans have been served. A close contact has been maintained by this committee with the United States Veterans' Bureau where it has been in a position to guard the interests of the disabled and to recommend and urge frequent improvements in the medical care and treatment afforded in the government hospitals. Many laws and amendments to the World War Veterans' Act have become laws through the support of the Legion and at the same time the Legion has urged that a liberal construction be placed upon these laws in order that the veteran will be given every benefit. Through the efforts of the Legion there was recovered for disabled veterans and the families of deceased veterans during the year 1929 a total of \$4,539,476.29 in the form of disability compensation, adjusted compensation, insurance and in retirement pay for disabled emergency officers of the World war.

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While the Legion is proud of what it has been able to accomplish for the disabled in the past, it appreciates the fact that a great deal more must still be done. The government has expanded its hospital facilities time and again but this expansion has not been rapid enough to meet increasing needs. Many veterans, particularly those suffering with mental disabilities, are denied government care today because there are no hospital beds available for them. A nation-wide survey conducted by the Legion last year showed that a bad condition prevailed. The Rogers bill which was passed by Congress last December and which appropriated \$15,950,000 for a hospital building program will go far towards correcting some of the conditions in which our mentally disabled are now suffering. But through this bill the Legion has obtained less than half of what it is asking and it is accordingly urging Congress to enact other legislation which will bring still further benefits to the disabled and which will liberalize existing laws. The American Legion believes that nothing is too good for the disabled and that an appreciative people should spare neither effort nor expense to lessen their suffering and to enable them to partake as fully as possible of the enjoyment of life.

Ever mindful of its duty to both the dead and the living, the Legion has a second great concern in looking after the welfare of another group of pitiful war sufferers, the dependent children of veterans. Child welfare work is therefore one of the major national activities of the organization. Every effort is being made by the Legion to see that the children of those who died in the service, or those who laid their health on the altar of the nation's defense, are given the opportunities in life which they have been deprived by the misfortune of war. The Legion's child welfare program is educational, legislative and provides for direct relief, and is designed to bring benefits and better conditions in life of all underprivileged children as well as the children of veterans. Through the educational phase of this program the Legion has done much to arouse the interest of the general public and to enlist their aid in this important work. In the legislative field it has brought about the enactment of improved child welfare laws in many states. Cases of direct relief have been numerous and in many instances permanent homes have been provided by the Legion or through its efforts. At this time the Legion is particularly concerned with providing the war orphans with an education which will equip them to earn their own living. In cooperation with the Legion Auxiliary a program has been formulated which contemplates state aid to supplement federal aid, and free scholarship in institutions of higher learning. This plan has thus far met with a most gratifying response from the various Legion departments.

On Memorial Day when we eulogize and lavish devotion upon the incomparable Americanism of the nation's heroic war dead, it is indeed appropriate that we should give some thought to ways and means of preventing a needless sacrifice of human life in future years. The men who make up the ranks of The American Legion today have seen war in all of its ruthlessness and it is their earnest desire that everything humanly possible be done to prevent its recurrence and consequent suffering. The Legion loves peace and wants peace but it insists that it be a peace with honor and not peace at any price. Every war this nation has fought has demonstrated the value of military preparedness. The Legion is convinced that an adequate national defense will not only afford protection to the nation and its people but will at the same time provide a definite assurance of peace. Military experts agree that had America been reasonably prepared at the outbreak of the World war the resultant loss of life would have been less.

While the Legion believes that nothing should be left undone to promote international friendships and to bring about a better understanding between nations, it also believes that this country should profit by the experiences of the World war and enact legislation to overcome the difficulties and the handicaps we have had to face in the past. This can be accomplished by writing into the basic law of the land the principle of the Universal Service in time of war. Such a principle when placed in practical operation would provide the country with an adequate national defense and in the event of war we would be prepared. As much as we long for peace we must realize that we can never hope to attain it by abolishing our military establishment. That course would only lead to disaster by openly inviting an armed invasion. War is a national sacrifice and every citizen and the property of every citizen should join in that sacrifice. There should be no profiteers or slackers. Existence of the universal service principle would take the profit out of war; it would provide equal service for all by coordinating, or controlling, the essential resources necessary for the success of modern warfare. These resources include man power, capital and materials.

Such matters as these--the rehabilitation of the disabled, caring for the children who suffered by the war, national defense and measures to bring about permanent peace--are all proper subjects for discussion and reflection on Memorial Day. These problems were brought about by the war, the same war that took such a costly toll of human life. We must ever keep faith with our soldier dead by meeting the problems of the nation and solving them in the best way we know how. The men who have died for America will have died in vain if we fail to perpetuate those ideals and principles which they held more dear than life itself. This day should serve to remind each and every American citizen of their individual obligations and duties to flag and country. Our nation was founded, and it has grown to greatness, through the self sacrifice of its patriots. The spirit of their sacrifice is abroad in the land today and from it we should gain a renewed inspiration to give freely of our efforts to make America a better land and to serve in whatever humble capacity it may fall our lot. As we place flowers of loving remembrance on the graves of the dead we should resolve that our patriotism will never falter or waver and that our heritage to future America will be a higher and nobler type of citizenship. In this way we will realize the full significance of Memorial Day and our words of tribute to the nation's war dead will come to have a real meaning.

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* Suggested Memorial Day address for *
* American Legion speakers, *
* 1941. *

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My Fellow American:

We are gathered here once again to observe Memorial Day.

It is a day sacred to the memory of American soldiers, sailors, and marines. Throughout our land today good citizens are paying tribute to the patriots of our history - the men who gave their lives for American independence in 1776, for the flag in 1812, for a united nation in 1861-65, and for the preservation of democracy in the World War.

The proudest boast of every American is that none of our honored dead sacrificed his life for an ignoble cause. They were all defenders of humanity, destroyers of prejudice, breakers of chains of bondage, champions of freedom and liberty - brave men who in the name of the future conquered the monster of their time.

That is why we owe them so much. We owe them everything as a nation. We owe them all as individual citizens. They dared to fight for what was right. They died to make right the master of might. Because they had that courage, we are an independent nation, and we are free men and women.

There can never be any tarnishing of the achievements of American freedom fighters at Valley Forge, at New Orleans, at Gettysburg, and at Chateau Thierry. They are history's step stones of the glory of American arms in defense of ideals more precious than life itself. Each marks a field of honor where brave Americans faced a nation's peril when it was an emergency, and overcame it. That's why America survived storm after storm. Nothing can ever detract from the measure of devotion of our noble dead, or the luster of their heroism.

The American Legion believes it is rank blasphemy for any one today to say that because war has come again to a troubled world, that the Americans who gave their lives for victory in the struggle of 1917-18 died in vain. They did not die in vain. They conquered the monster of their time.

That monster was predatory might. It presented a peril to our country that was as great as any we had ever faced. Our security and entire future were at stake. The flower of American manhood staved off that menace at the cost of untold toil, and sweat, and blood, and lives. Our World War defenders did not die in vain. But we, who survived, have made their victory questionable. We have lost in peace through indulgent living, some of what our hero dead won in war. The supremacy of the ideal that right is might needs be established again as a result of our indifference to the problems of the period.