

## The True Meaning of Memorial Day

H.S. #3  
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If you ask someone, "What is Memorial Day?", chances are your answer will be just a blank expression. Most Americans, and especially my generation, tend to forget or have never known the true meaning of the holiday and the reason we celebrate the day. Most Americans look at the day as simply a day off from work or school. But Memorial Day is so much more. It is a special day set aside to recognize and remember all of the men and women who have fought and died protecting our rights and liberties as Americans. The true meaning of Memorial Day is to take one day a year to thank and remember those who served in our military and sacrificed their lives so that we can live the way we do in the country that we love.

Memorial Day, or Declaration Day as it was originally called, began on May 5, 1868 as a day of remembrance for those who fought in the Civil War. Families and friends would mourn the death of a loved one and honor them by decorating their grave. This tradition continued for over one hundred years. Sadly, over the years, this Memorial Day tradition has been all but forgotten as have the sacrifices men and women have made for our country. I believe that, though this holiday was started a long time ago, its meaning still applies today. While my Grandfather did not die in war, I believe he is a perfect example of the true meaning of Memorial Day.

He volunteered to join the Navy as an 18 year old boy and served in the Pacific Theatre during World War II. Unfortunately, he passed away before I was born but I have heard stories about his time in the Navy. My mother told me that he rarely spoke about his time in the service but he kept a journal while he was in the War. In the journal, he wrote of his terror of being out in the open ocean at night and not knowing what else was out there with him. He also wrote

about his encounter with a sinking Japanese boat. His Patrol Boat was sent out to investigate and when they reached the boat, he saw men drowning and burning alive but he could do nothing to help; he had to listen to their screams and cries for help. These encounters and experiences that my Grandfather wrote about continued to haunt him for the rest of his life.

Because of my Grandfather, and many men like him, the American people can be proud and enjoy being American citizens. He, though scared and facing many obstacles, was willing to lay down his life for his country. He risked his life and endured nightmares from the war to ensure the freedom of the American people. Thus, because of his and all of our service men and women's sacrifices, we owe it to them to remember and honor their sacrifice to protect our country that we are lucky to live in.

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### Bibliography

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