

QuickStudy



HISTORY

Memorial Day



Overview

- Memorial Day, originally called Decoration Day, is a day of remembrance for the approximately 1.2 million individuals who have died serving in the armed forces.
- The holiday was officially proclaimed on May 5, 1868, by General John Logan, national commander of the Grand Army of the Republic. It was then first observed on May 30, 1868, when flowers were placed on the graves of Union and Confederate soldiers at Arlington National Cemetery—the nation's largest national cemetery—in Virginia.
- The first state to officially recognize the holiday was New York in 1873; by 1890, it was recognized by all the northern states.
- The South refused to acknowledge the day, honoring their dead on separate days until after World War I (when the holiday changed from honoring just those who died fighting in the Civil War to honoring Americans who died fighting in any war).
- Waterloo, NY, was officially declared the birthplace of Memorial Day by President Lyndon Johnson in May 1966, due to the town making the holiday an annual, community-wide event during which businesses closed and residents decorated the graves of soldiers with flowers and flags.
- It is now celebrated in almost every state on the last Monday in May (passed by Congress with the National Holiday Act of 1971 to ensure a three-day weekend for federal holidays), though several southern states have an additional separate day for honoring the Confederate war dead: January 19 in Texas; April 26 in Alabama, Florida, Georgia and Mississippi; May 10 in South Carolina; and June 3 (Jefferson Davis's birthday) in Louisiana and Tennessee.

Celebrating the Holiday

- Memorial Day typically begins with sunrise services in various parks and cemeteries across the country to remember the fallen members of the military.
- Graves of all who served in the military are traditionally decorated with American flags that day. The most notable example of this is at Arlington National Cemetery, where flags are placed on more than 200,000 graves of soldiers who have served or died in war; the president or vice president of the United States gives a speech and members of the armed forces shoot a rifle salute in the air.
- Many communities mark the day in different ways, usually through parades or various other activities.
- One major event involves the Boy Scouts and Cub Scouts of St. Louis, MO, who place flags on the 150,000 graves at Jefferson Barracks National Cemetery as an annual "Good Turn"—a practice that has taken place since 1951.
- In addition, on the Saturday before Memorial Day, Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts place a candle at each of the approximately 15,300 grave sites of soldiers buried at Fredericksburg & Spotsylvania National Military Park in Fredericksburg, VA.
- In Washington, D.C., a parade featuring marching bands and veterans units from all 50 states has been held since 2004.
- One of the longest standing traditions is the running of the Indianapolis 500, which has been held in conjunction with Memorial Day since 1911.
- Countless families also use the holiday to travel on vacation; in fact, travel destinations increase by 20 percent during the three-day weekend.

Wearing Red Poppies on Memorial Day



- Many people wear red poppies on Memorial Day in honor of those who died serving the nation during war.
- The origins of this tradition began in 1915 with Georgia resident Moina Michael; inspired by the poem "In Flanders Fields," Michael replied with her own poem:
We cherish too, the Poppy red
That grows on fields where valor led,
It seems to signal to the skies
That blood of heroes never dies.
- Michael then conceived of an idea to wear red poppies on Memorial Day to commemorate the memory of fallen soldiers.
- She was the first to wear one and sold poppies to her friends and co-workers, with the money going to benefit servicemen in need.
- Later on, a French woman, Madam Guerin, visited the United States and learned of the new custom started by Michael; when Guerin returned to France, she made artificial red poppies to raise money for war-orphaned children and widowed women.
- In 1921, the Franco-American Children's League sold poppies nationally to benefit war orphans of France and Belgium.
- When the League disbanded a year later, Guerin approached the VFW for help.
- Shortly before Memorial Day in 1922, the VFW became the first veterans' organization to nationally sell poppies.
- Two years later, the VFW's "Buddy" Poppy program was selling artificial poppies made by disabled veterans.
- In 1948, the U.S. Postal Service honored Michael for her role in founding the national poppy movement by issuing a red 3-cent postage stamp with her likeness on it.

Did You Know?

- The number of U.S. Armed Forces personnel who served in World War II between Dec. 1, 1941 and Dec. 31, 1946 was 16.1 million.
- The average length of active duty by U.S. military personnel during WWII was 33 months.
- The proportion of U.S. military personnel who served abroad during WWII was 73 percent.
- The average time U.S. personnel served overseas during WWII was 16 months.
- A total of 292,000 U.S. soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines were killed in battle in WWII.
- The number of other deaths sustained by U.S. forces during WWII was 114,000.
- 671,000 U.S. troops were wounded during WWII.
- 5.7 million World War II veterans were counted in the 2000 census. The census identified the period of service for World War II veterans as September 1940 through July 1947.
- The estimated number of WWII veterans living in California in 2002 was 475,000, the most in any state. Other states with high numbers of WWII vets included Florida (439,000), New York (284,000), Pennsylvania (280,000), Texas (267,000) and Ohio (208,000).
- The estimated number of women in 2002 who were WWII veterans was 210,000. These women comprised 4.4 percent of WWII vets.
- The proportion of all veterans in April 2000 who were WWII veterans was 22 percent.
- The median age of WWII veterans when the last census was conducted was 76.7 years of age.
- The proportion of WWII veterans who were still employed in 2000 was 11.6 percent.
- The number of WWII veterans in 2002 who received compensation for service-connected disabilities was 440,000, about half the number in 1990 (876,000) and almost two-thirds less than the nearly 1.2 million disabled WWII vets in 1980.
- The projected national expenditure for veterans' benefits in 2004 was \$62 billion.

War Facts & Figures

Revolutionary War

(1775-1783)
Served: No data
Deaths: 4,435
Wounded: 6,188

War of 1812

(1812-1815)
Served: 286,730
Battle Deaths: 2,260
Wounded: 4,505

Mexican War

(1846-1848)
Served: 78,718
Battle Deaths: 1,733
Other Deaths: 11,550
Wounded: 4,152

Civil War

(1861-1865)
Served: 2,213,363
Battle Deaths: 140,414
Other Deaths: 224,097
Wounded: 281,881

Spanish-American War

(1895-1902)
Served: 306,760
Battle Deaths: 385
Other Deaths: 2,061
Wounded: 1,662

World War I

(1917-1918)
Served: 4,734,991
Battle Deaths: 53,402
Other Deaths: 63,114
Wounded: 204,002

World War II

(1941-1946)
Served: 16,112,566
Battle Deaths: 291,557
Other Deaths: 113,842
Wounded: 671,846

Korean War

(1950-1953)
Served: 5,720,000
Battle Deaths: 33,651
Other Deaths: 3,262
Wounded: 103,284

Vietnam War

(1964-1973)
Served: 8,744,000
Battle Deaths: 47,378
Other Deaths: 10,799
Wounded: 153,303

Gulf War

(1991)
Served: 24,100
Deaths: 162

Afghanistan War

(2002-????)
Deaths: 505 (as of May 2007)

Iraq War

(2003-????)
Deaths: 3,398 (as of May 2007)
Wounded: 25,245



Top 25 Memorial Day Destinations

Walt Disney World, FL
Myrtle Beach, SC
Panama City, FL
Ocean City, MD
Virginia Beach, VA
Cedar Point, OH
Universal Studios, FL
Disneyland, CA
Cape Cod, MA
Six Flags Magic Mountain, CA
Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.
White House, Washington, D.C.
Outer Banks, NC

Yellowstone National Park, WY
Busch Gardens, VA
Hershey Park, PA
Statue of Liberty, NY
South Beach, FL
Yosemite National Park, CA
Sea World, FL
Grand Canyon, AZ
Bowers Beach, DE
Mall of America, MN
Niagara Falls, Canada
Napa Valley, CA

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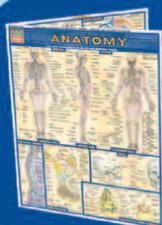
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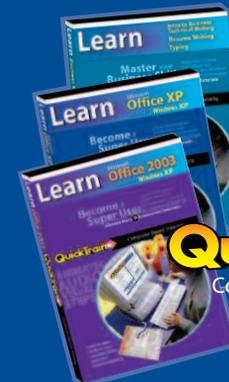


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