

GRAND COMMANDERY of OHIO

State News for May, 2024

Web Site: <https://ohioknightstemplar.com>

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Greetings, Sir Knights and Ladies,

What to write for the May article? Originally, I started writing an article about how we are a Christian Order and the obligations we have in regards to that. That concept changed, as my thoughts turned to the significance of placing a wreath on the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, combined with looking ahead to a memorial service I attend every year, and with Memorial Day being in May.

Some of you know I am not a native Ohioan. I was transferred to Wright-Patterson AFB in 1981 when there was a sudden need for telemetry operators, my career field in the U.S. Air Force.

On May 6th, 1981, there was a training mission for an EC-135 aircraft assigned to Wright-Patterson AFB. During that mission, while flying over Walkersville, MD, something tragic happened. The aircraft went down, with all 21 souls on board lost. I knew a couple of them from tech school.

Each year, on May 6th, at 10:30 in the morning, we still, to this day, hold a memorial service in the Memorial Park at the National Museum of the United States Air Force. A granite marker, along with 21 trees, commemorates the loss of the aircraft and all onboard. Ours was among the first memorials placed in the current location for the memorial park at the Museum. Last year there were over 50 crewmates, friends and family members that still gathered to commemorate the loss. In addition, nearly two dozen attended the memorial service at the location of the crash in Maryland.

If you get a chance to visit the National Museum of the United States Air Force in Dayton, stroll through the park. The museum's Memorial Park honors Air Force-associated units and people for their courageous service and sacrifice in the cause of freedom. In October 1972, the museum dedicated the first memorial with a commemorative tree and plaque recognizing Americans held as Prisoners of War by the North Vietnamese and those missing in action during the Southeast Asia War. The Memorial Park has grown significantly since that first dedication, with more than 500 memorials, including statuary memorials, plaques, trees and benches.

This brings me to Memorial Day, and the special meaning it has to me. I understand the risk taken by all that serve in the military. Every military member at one point in their life wrote a blank check made payable to "The United States of America," for an amount up to and including their life in service of their country – Memorial Day commemorates those who had their check cashed. I thought about it every time I boarded and deployed on the aircraft as a mission-crew member.

What is the meaning of Memorial Day? Memorial Day commemorates the men and women who died while serving in the United States Armed Forces, particularly those who died in battle or as a result of wounds sustained in battle. In other words, the purpose of Memorial Day is to memorialize the veterans who made the ultimate sacrifice for their country.

You'll find that some veterans find it dismaying when they are thanked on this day. It's a time remembering those who lost their lives and could not come home. We might consider how we can support and safeguard their grieving families and loved ones who are left behind, as well as reflecting on why we—the living—have the luxury and freedom that we enjoy today.

Traditionally, on Memorial Day (U.S.), volunteers often place small American flags on each grave site at national cemeteries. A national moment of remembrance takes place at 3:00 p.m. local time. Consider visiting a local cemetery to place flags; many organizations would be grateful for volunteers. Contact your local American Legion post, Daughters of the American Revolution, or Boy or Girl Scouts troops.

Memorial Day was originally known as Decoration Day, starting with the American Civil War. It's believed that the tradition of honoring the dead was inspired by the way Southern states decorated the graves of both Confederate and Union soldiers with flowers, wreaths, and flags.

Several cities and towns across the country lay claim as the first to observe Decoration Day. On May 5, 1866, Waterloo, New York, hosted its own community-wide event that, in 1966, led to President Lyndon Johnson declaring the town as the birthplace of Decoration Day.

Meanwhile, on May 5, 1868, inspired by the suggestion of veteran Maj. Gen. John A. Logan, commander-in-chief of the Grand Army of the Republic (a fraternal organization of Union Civil War veterans), issued General Order No. 11, designating the 30th of May as an annual day of remembrance. The idea caught on.

With the Civil War, America's need to honor its military dead became prominent as monuments were raised and ceremonies centering on the decoration of soldiers' graves were held in towns and cities throughout the nation.

After World War I, Decoration Day included all fallen soldiers, not just those from the Civil War, and the term "Memorial Day" started being used. By World War II, Memorial Day became the term in more common usage across different states, adopting resolutions to make it an official holiday.

Finally, in 1971, Memorial Day became a national holiday by an act of Congress. When the 1968 Uniform Monday Holiday Act took effect in 1971, a few federal holidays were moved to Monday to create three-day weekends; Memorial Day was set to occur on the last Monday in May. (story of meaning of Memorial Day courtesy of Almanac.com).

Let us raise a toast in honor of all those that gave their all, in service to our country.

Courteously,

Richard L Ganion, KCT

Right Eminent Grand Commander

Knights Templar of Ohio

Editor's note: The Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War, the successor to the Grand Army of the Republic, is dedicated to the preservation of the graves and memory of those who lost their lives during the War of the Rebellion and other wars that followed. Many camps will hold memorial services during the Memorial Day weekend. Check your local media outlets for information on planned events. Also, contact your local camp regarding the graves of Civil War veterans that may need preservation or restoration. "Let us never forget!"

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