



CG Column  
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This month heralds in Memorial Day and with it a time to remember and a time to refrain.

As we prepare for the first holiday weekend of the summer with grills and trips, it is important to remember the reason for the holiday. Across our nation and in selected foreign countries there are American national cemeteries; each neatly manicured with rows upon rows of meticulously aligned white headstones. Each headstone is a story of courage and selfless service.

Oliver Wendell Holmes, an infantry captain of the Civil War, remarked during his famous Memorial Day speech of 1884, "In the great democracy of self devotion, private and general stand side by side, unmarshalled save by their own deeds, the army of the dead sweep before us, 'wearing their wounds like stars'." He was speaking of the passion that Soldiers who have gone into battle regard for each other, but he was also alluding to those unknown to him. When taken in a broader context, his statement is also one about the equality in rank of those who have their final resting place in one of our national cemeteries.

Probably no better example exists of that equality than General George Patton, who is buried at the American Cemetery and Memorial in Hamm, Luxembourg, alongside his Soldiers of the U.S. Third Army. There are others who are less well-known, such as Private Juan Jose, cook, Company D, 3rd Machine Gun Battalion, 3rd Division, World War I, Purple Heart, buried at the national cemetery in Fort Leavenworth – his sacrifice undiminished by title. Included in the cemetery are the graves of more than 150 Indian scouts who served on the Western Frontier in the nineteenth century US Army. Within a few feet of those headstones you will find the marker of Sergeant Percival Lowe, author of "Five Years a Dragoon." His journal provides a glimpse of life as an NCO in the 1850s. Throughout our military cemeteries are the memories and the legacy of America's military past.

Today, Memorial Day is diffused by other activities on this first weekend of summer. With fewer and fewer veterans, this day has lost some of its connection to our citizens. Sadly, approximately 1,000 World War II veterans die each day. It's incumbent upon us to continue to remember the reason for Memorial Day.

Memorial Day is a day of remembrance and a day to refrain.

While we enjoy the start of the '100 Days of Summer,' we need to refrain from the activities that put our safety at risk. Many of us will take trips on Memorial Day. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, "the '100 Days of Summer' represent one of the most dangerous and deadliest times of year on the nation's highways." The NHTSA states on its website, "every 30 minutes, nearly 50 times a day, someone in America dies in an alcohol-related crash. This means you, your friends, and your family are regularly at risk."

Safety is just as important on lakes and rivers, too. According to the boating statistics provided by the Department of Homeland Security, more than two-thirds of all fatal boating accident victims drowned, and of those, 90 percent were not wearing a life jacket. DHS lists operator inattention, careless/reckless operation, passenger/skier behavior, and excessive speed as the primary contributing factors in boating accidents. Alcohol use is the leading contributing factor in about one-fifth of all fatal boating accidents.

Driving and boating are but two activities we can expect on Memorial Day; there are many others. Attention to detail and a careful risk assessment will help mitigate many of the dangers associated with the '100 Days of Summer.'

In summary, this Memorial Day take the time to reflect on the reason for the holiday and visit one of America's national cemeteries. Also, take the time to review appropriate safety procedures before beginning any summertime activity. Each and every one of you are valued members of our team.....we need all of us!

*SECURE THE HIGH GROUND!*