

Worth Dying For? You & Liberty

Within the civilized world, we share a common desire for certain human traits. If you look across history and examine facts, fables, and spiritual philosophies, you will see that certain behaviors are held in the highest of esteem. One of these characteristics is courage (wisdom, justice, and moderation are also well regarded).

What is courage? Over 2,300 years ago, Aristotle provided a definition of courage within his *Nicomachean Ethics* that has stood the test of time, geography and civilization's evolution. Aristotle described courage as a virtue that lies between the extremes of cowardice and recklessness.

We are familiar with courageous behavior being opposite from a coward's actions. However, we less often consider courage and its relationship to recklessness. Fairy tales may be at fault for overlooking courage as non-recklessness. The knights in those stories often show no fear as they battle against dragons and other foes.

Aristotle would have categorized a fairy tale knight's mindset as reckless. Courage is not a blind, charge-the-dragon bravado. Courage occurs when knights experience fear from knowing that a dragon may kill them, which causes the knights to pause and consider options...and then still choose to battle. Similarly, every day people display courage when they face challenges knowing that they could be harmed...and yet still undertake the challenges.

In just a few more weeks, we will all have an opportunity to honor the military men and women who courageously risked—and lost—their lives for our country and our way of life. Memorial Day, originally known as Decoration Day, carries on a reverent historical tradition that began after the American Civil War, when Americans decorated the graves of the war dead with flowers on different days throughout America's cities..

In 1868, General John Logan, commander of the Grand Army of the Republic, an organization of Union veterans, called for May 30th to be designated as the national Decoration Day (the date was picked in part because it was not a date of a battle). By the late 1800s, Decoration Day became a national holiday and in 1971, Congress passed the Uniform Monday Holiday Act, which moved Decoration Day to the last Monday in May.

Abraham Lincoln honored our Nation's fallen military members and called upon us to carry on their defense of our values during his Gettysburg Address. Lincoln told us, "It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced." The price of our "life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness" has been high. If we want our unalienable rights to survive we must be vigilant and continue the fight for them against those whose values undermine America's foundational principles.

There are a number of activities that allow us to reflect, honor, and advance the sacrifices that have been made for our freedom. For example, you could:

- Visit a cemetery or memorial to pay your respects to the fallen with flowers
- Buy a red poppy flower from a VFW member and decorate something with it
- Attend a Memorial Day ceremony

- Fly the American flag at half-staff
- Donate to a veterans' organization
- Volunteer your time to help a veteran
- Talk to children about the importance of Memorial Day

I have dedicated this month's column to remember the sacrifices of those who fought and died for our freedom. May we each take a moment to reflect on what their sacrifice means to us. Let us honor them by upholding the values that they fought for and died for. We owe them a debt of gratitude that can never be fully repaid. We can honor them by living our lives in ways that reflect the ideals they held dear.

My final thoughts shared this month come from a poster that I encountered at a small inn while visiting Bayeux, France, near the shore of a D-Day battlefield. It states:

"Dear Veteran,

I am writing to "Thank you" and, through me, there are thousands of children speaking to thousands of Veterans. Like us, you were young and carefree, but when you were only 20 years old, Liberty called you saying "I am dying. Come and save me!"

And you arose, full of courage and to answer that call.

You underwent training, day after day for "D" Day and, one day in June, you arrived by air and sea. And you fought with the heart and soul of a free man, so that we too might be free.

You saw your fellows fall on our beaches and in our fields and, in spite of your grief and your injuries, you stayed on and fought side-by-side with us. And so, dear Veteran, I want to tell you, regarding those dear to you who sacrificed their youth and are now resting in peace, the sleep of the just, that

WE ARE THE CHILDREN THEY NEVER HAD.

And to you, dear Veteran, who offered your bravery and your most promising years for this our land, I say to you

WE ARE THE SONS AND DAUGHTERS OF LIBERTY who want to say a heartfelt "MERC!"

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