



“What is Memorial Day”

Written and Presented by:

Washington Township Councilman Jack Yerkes



Washington Township Memorial Service

Franklin Atkinson Park
Monday, May 29, 2023

Good morning, Veterans! Ladies, gentlemen, young ladies and men.

Thank you for attending this Memorial Day Service today as we memorialize those Veterans who did not return home – giving their life up for our **freedom** so we enjoy today. Our 5th President and Veteran War Hero President John F. Kennedy once said, “Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country”! I think all Veterans have accepted his challenge!

Memorializing – This is what Memorial Day is. Remembrance of those making the ultimate sacrifice – never to return home alive to live out their life and dreams, think of that. Think of that. Let that sink in. Usually in a foreign land, your whole life ahead of you, gone forever. But not forgotten. Our being here today, it’s a small token of our appreciation for those heroic service members.

We honor and memorialize today, at our memorial service. We can start with the shots fired at Bunker Hill through the Revolutionary War, the War of 1812, Spanish-American War, WWI (the war to end all wars), Korean War, Vietnam War (welcome home gentlemen), Granada, Desert Storm, Persian Gulf War, Iraq, Afghanistan, and numerous Middle East war incursions, to the end of our involvement in the Afghanistan war.

Brave Americans of every faith, color, race, and sex, young and old, we thank you for your service. We memorialize you today with song, prayers, and speech. You are the reason we enjoy our freedoms today. May your sacrifice never be forgotten.

Memorial Day began as, “**Memorialization Day**” which started about October 1864 in Boalsburg, PA. People placed about 620,000 wreaths on graves of men killed in the Civil War. Staggering! New York State was the first state to designate “Decoration Day” a legal holiday in 1873, and by 1890 every other “Union” state followed suit, but not the confederate states. It wasn’t until after World War I, that the shift went to honor all the men and women killed in the Civil War.

Veteran's Day, November 11th was formed after World War I to honor all members of the US Military, allowing them to "Share their Experiences" with us. **Take the time to talk with our Veterans.**

An important date to remember is 1968, our 36th President Lyndon Johnson signed into law, the "Uniform Holiday Bill", forming a package of several Federal Holidays into the "tail end of 3-day weekends" – hoping to encourage travel and commerce.

Waterloo, New York, no not France, November 1966 became the birthplace of Memorial Day, and making the 4th Monday of May, the "**Day for Memorial Day**" – the unofficial beginning of the summer season.

Let me share with you 2 famous quotes regarding Memorial Day:

1st – "We do not know one promise these men made, one pledge they gave, one word they spoke, but we do know they summed up and perfected, by one supreme act, the highest virtues of men and citizens, for love of country they accepted death, and thus resolved all doubts, and made immortal their patriotism and their virtue" – **20th President, Gerald James Garfield** at Arlington National Cemetery – where 20,000 graves were dedicated with flowers.

2nd – "Our debt to the heroic men and valiant women in the service of our country can never be repaid. They have earned our underlying gratitude. America will never forget their services!" – our **33rd President, Harry S. Truman.**

In 2000, **President Bill Clinton, our 42nd President** signed the "National Moment of Remembrance Act" encouraging Americans to pause the Memorial Day activities at 3pm local time, to "Reflect" on those who died while serving the country. Please try to keep this in mind today as we enjoy being together with family, friends, and neighbors!

Some pertinent dates. Our **28th President, Woodrow Wilson**, proclaimed the "First Armistice Day" November 11th 1919, temporarily suspended business by 11:00 am and commemorate with parades. Congress recognized November 11th as Observance Day in 1926. In 1938 Armistice Day became a legal US Holiday – Dedicated to the Promise of World Peace. How do we observe Memorial Day? We attend memorial services like the one we are observing today. We decorate Veterans Graves with flowers, flags, and receive prayers.

I want to give a special thank you to Council Vice President Richard Bennett who with his Boy Scout Troup and Volunteers placed American Flags on the graves of all deceased Veterans at the Bethel Mill United Methodist Church on Delsea Drive.

I would like to end with two quotes from two well known and famous Patriots:

1st - "Veterans know better than anyone else the price of freedom for they've suffered the scars of war. We can offer them no better tribute than to protect what they have won for us".

– **President Ronald Reagan**

2nd – "The soldier above all others prays for peace, for it's the soldier who must suffer and bear the deepest wounds and scars of war."

- **General Douglas MacArthur**

Thank you for listening and your participation in our 2023 Memorial Day Service for all Service Members who served our America!

I want to leave you with these two questions:

- 1) What will YOU do to observe this Memorial Day going forward?
- 2) What will YOU do to protect what our Veterans have won for us?

Government meetings, council meetings, county commissioner meetings, etc – whether in person or "live streaming" on our Township YouTube Channel – a FIRST that this council team noted on January 3rd when we were sworn in as your town council.

Be involved, join, and participate in any number of community action organizations – scouts, athletics, rotary, chamber of commerce, church organizations, and yes – political organizations and for our youth in the military when of age. Never forget how we got here, 247 years after declaring our Independence from King George III of England! And the unselfish sacrifices made for us by our veterans!

Thank you and God Bless our Troops, our Veterans past and present, our community, state and national leaders, Congress, and most of all the USA. I would be remiss if I didn't repeat this quote from our first President, our namesake – "to be prepared for war is one of the most effective means of preserving peace."

Good day – Thank you Washington Township!

Councilman Jack Yerkes 5/29/23