

Memorial Day Speech

25 May 2015

- *Bob Henry, Lt. Col., USAF, Ret.*

Welcome—and thank you-- each and every one of you for sharing this most solemn and honorable day—MEMORIAL DAY! Special thanks to Northfield Select-board, Town Leaders, Police Officers, Pioneer Valley Regional High School Band, Northfield VFW Post 9874, Five Acre Farm for the Grave Site Geraniums and MOST IMPORTANTLY ALL OF YOU for recognizing the true meaning and importance of Memorial Day.

When asked to speak.... my mind raced with a multitude of ideas but the overwhelming theme of Memorial Day is that of “Loss”. So my theme today in hopes of Honoring all of the fallen Soldiers, Sailor’s, Airman, Marine and Coast Guardsman will be “Loss” but in addition to “Loss” will be “GRATITUDE”, “RESPECT” and most importantly “CELEBRATION”!!! Celebration of “Great Americans”!!! Seventeen, 18, 19 year old boys (M E N) going off to fight for what they believed in---or that they believed in what their government had decided for them.

To understand Memorial Day we must define its origin. Memorial Day, originally called Decoration Day, is a day of remembrance for those who have died in service of the United States of America. Over two dozen cities and towns claim to be the birthplace of MEMORIAL DAY. While Waterloo N.Y. was officially declared the birthplace of Memorial Day by President Lyndon Johnson in May 1966, it’s difficult to prove conclusively the origins of the day. Regardless of the exact date or location of its origin one thing is clear--- Memorial Day was borne out of the Civil War and a desire to HONOR our DEAD. It was officially proclaimed on 5 May 1868 by General John Logan, National Commander of the Grand Army of the Republic, in his General Order No. 11. “The 30th of May 1868, is designated for the purpose of strewing with flowers, or otherwise decorating the graves of comrades who died in defense of their country during the late rebellion, and whose bodies now lie in almost every city, village and hamlet churchyard in the land”, he proclaimed.

The date of Decoration Day, as he called it, was chosen because it WASN'T the anniversary of any particular battle. On the first Decoration Day, General James Garfield made a speech at Arlington National Cemetery, and 5,000 participants decorated the graves of the 20,000 Union and Confederate soldiers buried there. Memorial Day as we know it today is now observed in almost every state on the last Monday in May with Congressional passage of the National Holiday Act of 1971.

Now try and imagine 17,18,19 year old “kids”, some even lied about their age and were even younger, fighting at the Battle of Somme where in a single day of the Battle on 1 July 1916, 60,000 British troops were lost. World War II where any given day 10-100 US B17 Bombers, each with a crew of 6, could be blown out of the sky---often times squadrons would lose 60-120 men daily. Fighting at the Inchon Reservoir in Korea where there was an endless resupply of Chinese troops even without food and logistic and while freezing they were advancing and fighting to the death. War is costly and at times of war no one prays harder for peace than the soldier involved. The fighting spirit was a true force multiplier and a keen example of the phenomenal power of Positive Mental Attitude of these men and women was summed up in the book Bomber Boys; where the Germans had resurrected a B17 and infiltrated a squadron of B17 Bombers heading into Germany; the gunner of a US B17 radioed his pilot Lt Mike Swana who was already having trouble with the aircraft and informed him another B17 beside them was shooting at them and what was he to do---Lt Swana calmly replied “Well I guess we better start shooting back”!! And yes the US crew did and they safely make it back to base that day and home after the war—but they were the very lucky one’s. It is believed that just before one enters into battle there is a universal prayer; “May God help me”.

Recognized and labeled conflicts have cost well over 1.3 million US lives. Out of respect to those we are here to recognize “EACH and EVERY ONE of them. Before I try and put a face to the number--Let me break down US combat losses by conflict; American Revolutionary War—25,000, Civil War—625,000, World War 1---116,516, World War II—405,399, Korean War

36,516, Vietnam War—58,209, Gulf War 258, Iraq—4,800, and Afghanistan—2,233 to date.

I cannot put names to all of our losses but this cemetery can---Northfield cemeteries recognize and pay respect to the dead dating back to before the Revolutionary War---visit these cemeteries there are some SEVEN cemeteries in Northfield all rich with our history. We will honor all of those who gave their “all” by learning about our Service Men and Women from Northfield and Massachusetts who died while serving this great nation. We will put honored names to these numbers and I will try to put a face to these names.

I cannot begin to properly recognize all the GREAT Americans that have made the ultimate sacrifice but I feel obligated to name a few that hold special meaning to either Post 9874 or myself.

James A. Ayube II, 25, Salem Ma, Sgt USA, Killed in Action 8 Dec 2010 Balkh, Afghanistan. He is survived by his parents, James and Christina Ayube; wife, Lauren Elizabeth Ayube; brother, Alex Ayube; sister. **Quote:** If I can stop one heart from breaking, I shall not live in vain; If I can ease one life the aching, Or cool one pain; Or help one fainting robin, Unto his nest again; I shall not live in vain. - Emily Dickinson.

Tyler J. Trahan, 22, East Freetown Ma, Petty Officer Second Class, Explosive Ordnance Team #12, Naval Special Warfare Command, KIA 30 Apr 2009 Fallujah, Iraq.

Ari Brown Weeks, 23, of Leyden Ma, Army Specialist, died 10 Sep 2007. Ari , an only child of Jon Weeks and Karyn Brown, and husband to Ashley, died along with six other soldiers while returning from a raid in Baghdad when the truck they were riding in veered off the road and plunged some 30 feet.

Michael James Tobey, 19, USA, Sgt, Infantryman, 26 Sep 1968 Binh Dinh Province South Vietnam

Harold Leon Shattuck, Jr, 20, Private First Class, Anti-Tank Assaultman, 15 Jun 1969 Quang Tri Province South Vietnam.

Ronald Earl Sherman, 19, Private First Class, Medical Corpsman, 30 Mar 1966 location not reported South Vietnam.

Marty Gehring Given, 20, Northfield, WO1, USA Helicopter Pilot Killed Kontum Province South Vietnam 21 Nov 1968 less than 4 months into his tour. Casualty Type: Hostile. Left behind three sisters and four brothers.

Fred G. Parker: Frederick G. Parker, Specialist 4, Infantryman, would be Northfield's second and fortunately last loss of the Vietnam conflict. Fred Parker died just one month after his 20th birthday on Christmas Eve, 24 December 1968, while serving with the 5th Infantry Division in Quang Tri South Vietnam. Fred's brother Larry who is retired from Air Force Reserve is with us as a member of Northfield's VFW Post 9874.

Glen Douglas Hine, 19, Leyden, Ma, Specialist 4, Infantryman, 2 May 1966 just short of four months into his tour. Hau Nghia Province South Vietnam Casualty Type: Hostile Fire.

I know I shared the story of Capt. Alan Brudno last year but I have a few more facts this year and I believe a strong tie in to this Memorial Day.

Capt. Alan Brudno, Quincy Mass and MIT Grad, committed suicide just one day before his 33rd birthday. On 18 Oct 1965 Capt. Tom Collins and Capt. Alan Brudno, 25 years old, of the 68th TFS were tasked with a bridge near Ha Tinh, Vietnam. As they rolled their F4C tail number 64-0730 in for weapons delivery their aircraft was hit by anti aircraft artillery and became uncontrollable, they both ejected successfully but were immediately captured and spent the next seven and one half years of torture and solitaire confinement in various North Vietnamese prison camps. Both were released with the first returning POWs on 12 Feb. 1973. His death on 3 June 1973, just one day before his 33rd birthday, four months after his release, the first of any released prisoners of war, was the wake up call that NOT ALL WOUNDS ARE

VISIBLE. He was posthumously awarded two Silver Stars, the Legion of Merit, two Bronze Stars, the Distinguished Flying Cross, two Purple Hearts and many other decorations for his bravery.

Capt. Alan Brudno's name was withheld from the Vietnam Wall for many years and until finally after wife Debby, brother Robert, family, friends and fellow POWs had the Department of Defense review his case which states; "Brudno endured long term, severe physical and psychological abuse and torture-related wounds inflicted by the enemy in the defined combat zone—and from the devastating effects of these wounds he succumbed within a short time after his release from captivity.

On Memorial Day 2004 Capt. Edward Alan Brudno's name was added to the Vietnam Wall. On 1 Jun 2005 Captain Brudno was reburied with full military honors in Arlington National Cemetery, just as he asked for in his will. Capt. Alan Brudno now lays in rest at Arlington with his fellow warrior brothers and sisters; it is because of Capt. Brudno that the Dept. of Defense reviewed how they treated and evaluated returning warriors and how they integrated them back into quote/unquote family and daily life. The returning Vietnam Veterans did not have the "welcome home" or the support systems we have today----and I have to wonder how many other Alan Brudno's were there that did not have determined wife, brother, friends and family to follow thru and get it "right".

I share this as a reminder, on this and future Memorial Days, that we can all play a support role to returning Veterans and we can all extend that simple — "Hello, how are you doing?" Show that we do truly care. As I groomed a family grave site and assisted some fellow "groomers" with water to clean headstones this past week---I met a fellow Veteran. While sitting down planting flowers --yes men in uniform do plant flowers-- he came over to ask if I had been to Iraq or any of them places---I said well yea—like so many others I had---he reached out with a handshake and said, "welcome home"—it was touching but what was even more touching and even emotionally disturbing was he said he was a Vietnam Vet and he wanted me to have the handshake and welcome home he never got. That comment cut thru me like a knife—I felt deep hurt and the utmost compassion for him. I stood up and shook his hand again and let him know that I lived and went to school in Bangkok Thailand from 1968-1972 while my father spent 6 years in and out of Vietnam and that there was a whole country that thanked him—Thailand. I was

working on my mother's grave who was a civilian nurse at 5th Field Army Hospital, Bangkok, Thailand and my father's grave who was a retired USAF Officer as mentioned above serving 6 years in various countries of South East Asia.

I also proudly thanked him for his service and we parted ways. My mind raced back to Capt. Alan Brudno and what it must have been like for him to have to try and return to a "normal" life after 7 and ½ years of agonizing hell as a POW. It is not the "warrior we ever shall blame for the war"—do not forget it. And when thinking about saying; "hello how are you doing?"--Do not be intimidated by the gruesome scars or the prosthesis—don't be! Just let it out;—"Hey—Welcome home, how are you doing?" That was the sincerest and warmest handshake I ever received and I only pray mine was received the same!

I am extremely proud to share this Memorial Day with YOU and TOGETHER I do believe we have honored the fallen!!!! On behalf of Post 9874 and myself, let me take the privilege of thanking you for not only sharing this Memorial Day but also knowing in my heart that you will continue with the noble tradition and meaning of "Memorial Day"!

Thank you all and God Bless!!!

Bob Henry, Lt Col, USAF, Ret