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The U.S. Embassy in Ukraine

# Memorial Day

Newsletter

May 2006

Soldier, rest, thy warfare o'er,  
Dream of fighting fields no more.  
Sleep the sleep that knows not breaking,  
Morn of toil, nor night of waking.

*Sir Walter Scott*

Memorial Day is much more than a three-day weekend that marks the beginning of summer. To many people in the United States, especially the nation's thousands of combat veterans, this day, which has a history stretching back all the way to the Civil War, is an important reminder of those who died in the service of their country. Memorial Day was originally known as Decoration Day because it was a time set aside to honor the nation's Civil War dead by decorating their graves.

Memorial Day began as a memorial for Civil War veterans. After the Civil War many people in the North and South placed flowers on the graves of fallen soldiers. In the spring of 1866, Henry C. Welles, a druggist in the village of Waterloo, NY, suggested that the patriots who had died in the Civil War should be honored by decorating their graves. General John B. Murray, Seneca County Clerk, embraced the idea and a committee was formed to plan a day devoted to honoring the dead. Townspeople made wreaths, crosses and bouquets for each veteran's grave. The village was decorated with flags at half mast. On May 5 of that year, a processional was held to the town's cemeteries, led by veterans. The town observed this day of remembrance on May 5 of the following year as well.

Memorial Day was first widely observed on May 30, 1868. On May 5 of that year, General John A. Logan declared in General Order No. 11 that:

*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. In this observance no form of ceremony is prescribed, but posts and comrades will in their own way arrange such fitting services and testimonials of respect as circumstances may permit.*

In 1971, Memorial Day was declared a national holiday to be held on the last Monday in May.

No survivor of the Civil War remains, but Americans still take time each Memorial Day to remember soldiers who gave their lives in the service of the United States. It is customary for the president or vice-president to give a speech honoring the contributions of the dead and lay a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. About 5,000 people attend the ceremony each year.

Today, Memorial Day marks the unofficial beginning of the summer season in the United States. It is still a time to remember those who have died. It also is a time for families to get together for picnics, ball games, and other early summer activities. Most states officially recognize the May Memorial Day as a legal holiday, but it is not celebrated on May 30th in every state; several Southern states continue to set aside a special day for honoring the Confederate dead, which is usually called Confederate Memorial Day. Over time the holiday has expanded to encompass our other national wars. Although Veteran's Day is celebrated as well, Memorial Day has become the most important day of recognition of our armed forces.

*For more information about Memorial Day, visit*  
[http://www.patriotism.org/memorial\\_day/index.html](http://www.patriotism.org/memorial_day/index.html)  
<http://wilstar.com/holidays/memday.htm>  
<http://www.historychannel.com/exhibits/memorial/?page=history>

**We offer a selection of lesson plans and classroom resources links that help students learn more about Memorial Day.selection of Memorial Day lesson plans:**

TheTeachersCorner: Memorial Day Lesson Plans and Activities, a collection of links.  
<http://www.theteacherscorner.net/seasonal/memorial-day/index.htm>

Education Place: Memorial Day activities for students; various age groups.  
[http://www.eduplace.com/monthlytheme/may/memorial\\_activities.html](http://www.eduplace.com/monthlytheme/may/memorial_activities.html)

teachervision.com: A collection of resources on Memorial Day.  
<http://www.teachervision.fen.com/memorial-day/united-states/6644.html>

The Memory Shall Be Ours: Celebrating Memorial Day  
An Internet Treasure Hunt plus Web-based activities for learning about and celebrating Memorial Day!  
[http://www.education-world.com/a\\_lesson/lesson119.shtml](http://www.education-world.com/a_lesson/lesson119.shtml)