

Memorial Day

- Maddy van Dussen

Memorial Day is a federal holiday, assigned to the last Monday of every May. This day is dedicated to men and women who have died while in service of the United States Military. Up until the twentieth century, the date was called Decoration Day, in commemoration of Confederate and Union soldiers who died in the American Civil War only. Today, Memorial Day honors all those who have died while in the military.

People honor the dead soldiers in a variety of ways. In old tradition, flags are raised to full staff, then lowered to mid staff until noon, after which it is raised to full staff for the rest of the holiday. Graves are often visited by family, friends or loved ones. They may adorn the graves with flowers and other sentimental paraphernalia, hence why the holiday was once named "Decoration Day." More public festivities are also held. Memorial Day parades are common in which a community comes together to celebrate the bravery and sacrifice given that allow us to have and maintain freedom. Oftentimes, current service men and women march in these parades and are also honored. Speeches are given, commending the character of both the living and the dead.

When I think about Christmas, I think presents. When I think about the Fourth of July, I think fireworks. The same goes for Memorial Day. I think of a three day weekend, barbeques, and the start of summer. I admit that the word "honor" does not initially come to mind. It may not come to mind at all. I am guilty of, and I am sure others are too, of the all too common undermining of a federal holiday. Many use the holiday as an excuse to hold barbeques, use face paint, and pull out their summer wardrobe, just as many use the day the United States adopted the Declaration of Independence as a reason to light fireworks. The parades, speeches, and grave visitings are all important in remembering our soldiers. Yet in this day and age, it is easy to forget about the core meaning of things and to lose sight of what the real importance of something is. In 1968, the Uniform Monday Holiday Act was passed, moving Memorial Day from its original date of May 3, to the last Monday of every May. This ensured that there would be a three day weekend. Many people vacation on Memorial Day weekend because of the extra day off. I believe this leads to a further disconnect between the actual holiday and the celebrations that occur. Why are people celebrating if they don't know what they are celebrating for?

This Memorial Day, I challenge you to take time out of your long weekend to truly appreciate those who died for us. Those who cannot be with us, but have allowed us to have the privileges and liberties that we have today.