
Slipper's Soliloquies

by Fred Slipper

Memorial Day

Reflections

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Memorial Day is coming up and I am wondering what impact the day will have on you. I imagine that, like many of us, your thoughts will be of your loved ones who have passed away, and maybe you will visit the cemetery and place some flowers on their graves. Nowadays Memorial Day seems to be a accepted as a general day of remembering anyone who has died.

It wasn't intended that way. Back in 1868, General John A. Logan, Commander-in-Chief of the Grand Army of the Republic (an association of United States veterans) proclaimed May 30 as a day of remembrance of soldiers who had died in the Civil War. Due to the bitterness still felt in the South, the Confederate States refused to recognize May 30, so they set their own day, or days. The Confederate Memorial Days were variously set on April 26, May 10, and June 3.

Patriotism ran high during the Spanish-American War and veterans who died in this conflict were duly honored on Memorial Day.

We were still a country united during the "War to End All Wars," World War I, and the casualties of this war were remembered with large ceremonies throughout the country on May 30.

Then came the war I was associated with, World War II, and veterans were still considered heroes, with the appropriate Memorial Day ceremonies, many conducted by veterans organizations such as the American Legion or Veterans of Foreign Wars.

After World War II, lifestyles began to change and the world became much smaller, due largely to airplane travel. What used to seem faraway lands, with exotic names, became just overnight plane rides and apparently Uncle

Sam felt he had to assume the position of "big brother" to places we had only read about in travel brochures.

Hence, the Korean "conflict," as it was called, and the Vietnam "liberation." I don't care what they were called, you can get killed just as dead in a "conflict" or a "liberation" as you can in a war. However, some of the general public didn't seem to recognize this fact, and when May 30, Memorial Day, rolled around on the calendar it had lost some of its glamour.

The same is true of Armistice Day, which is usually associated with the end of fighting in World I on November 11, 1918. Originally, a minute of silence was scheduled for 11:00 a.m. on November 11 of the succeeding years, but I doubt if few of the present generation even know about this. In fact, the word "armistice" has such little meaning nowadays that after World War II Congress abandoned the word and we now are supposed to call November 11 *Veterans Day*. Apparently Congress felt we would always have veterans, but no more armistices.

The Pentagon wants to keep us all excited about Memorial Day and Veterans Day, so each year there are big, government-sponsored ceremonies at such places as Gettysburg and the National Cemetery at Arlington. But on the local level, organizations like the American Legion and Veterans of Foreign Wars are hard pressed to find enough participants for a firing squad.

So that is why, dear readers, on Memorial Day you see *all* the graves in the various cemeteries decorated with flowers, instead of just the graves of veterans, as General Logan had intended 'way back in 1868.
