

Memorial Day 2009

Being here today to honor our fallen heroes brings back a particular memory of my high school days. Back when I was in high school and the military was still using flint-lock weapons, I was required to read a poem at a Memorial Day assembly. My public speaking teacher, who had a sense of humor, assigned me the reading of a Joyce Kilmer poem entitled *A Prayer of the Man in a Trench*. Kilmer was, of course, better known for the poem *Trees*.

My first comment to my teacher at the time was “Who is she?” I was given the additional assignment of writing a paper on who **she** was!

That poem has always remained in my heart. The first stanza of the poem reads like this.

*“I shiver with the bitter cold and ache from head to feet,
And wrap my blanket fold to fold, as others do in lines untold.
‘Til blood soaked edges meet, but lo how heavy is my heart.
I think of home afar, the wife from whom I had to part,
That I might fight this war O Lord, when I only wanted peace.
O God who was man with us, pray God that war may cease”*

The irony of it all is that just two years later, I found myself with the same feelings and fears, as I was just beginning my tour of duty in Viet Nam. However, I was much luckier than Joyce Kilmer. You have to understand that I came home alive. Sgt. Kilmer made the ultimate sacrifice on 30 July 1918 in France. Joyce Kilmer was killed in the war to end all wars.

We are here today to honor, respect and pray for those of our fallen comrades who made the same sacrifice for the freedoms and rights that we enjoy today.

While growing up, I marched in many Memorial Day parades. I can remember the great numbers of people who would watch from the sidelines and who would follow us into the cemeteries to listen to the tributes and remembrances, as we are doing today. Over the years, those numbers of people who care, remember or respect those whom we honor today have been decreasing at an alarming rate. It appears that now that the only people who remember, or care why we celebrate or remember the significance of this day are the families, the loved ones and **us** – those who fought alongside our heroes, watching, sometimes helplessly, their friends die.

Memorial Day, for most people, has simply become just another three day weekend signifying the beginning of summer. But, for those of us who are here today, and in every cemetery across this great nation, Memorial Day continues to have a much different and more important meaning. As long as we have organizations such as the American Legion, VFW and DAV, just to name a few, this day – Memorial Day – will always have the importance it deserves.

I would like to read the poem by Joyce Kilmer, fittingly called “*Memorial Day*” and conclude with a prayer.