

Failure of Memory

Written by Alex Baer

Monday, 28 May 2012 15:38 - Last Updated Monday, 28 May 2012 17:39

So here we are: Arrived safe and sound at another, formerly-sacred, national holiday -- one more red-letter day reduced in status by many Americans as just one more blip on the radar of Super Inventory Clearance Furniture Sales.

If we still have jobs, cars, and money for gas, we celebrate the holiday by herding ourselves onto the nation's highways in the style of massed wildebeest migrations, trying to eke out two days and two nights away from wherever it is we usually hang our hats.

Memorial Day, or Decoration Day, as it was originally known, used to be time set aside by everyone to take a moment to remember those who died in military service to the country.

More than likely, many veterans -- both living and dead -- would agree: There is little honor in death; there is just death. Even so, many people cannot be bothered to bother with memory of the military dead, no more than they can be bothered to pay witness to the military still living.

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What is left when honor is lost? - Publilius Syrus, c. 100 BCE

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Ending war of any type, and for all time, would be a noble way to remember the military dead, and help establish the truest-hearted Memorial Day observation we could provide.

I do not expect any nations or people to suddenly discover that kind of strength or courage within their DNA. We could, however, at least honor the bare truth of our deeds, not simply steer by our speeches, and muster the strength and the courage to call things as they really are.

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We could, I say once again, at least change the name of the Department of Defense back to its former nomenclature, one that honestly describes our natures and intents, which is to call it the Department of War. Better yet? *The Department of Endless Wars.*

If we are to experience an unending state of military conflict and wars serving corporate interests -- as we have been living without interruption since Europeans landing on these shores and our country first created -- we could at least have the simple decency to stop pretending anyone is defending anything.

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You may have heard about the alarming suicide rate among active duty soldiers. From 2004 to 2008, that rate jumped 80 percent. Data indicates 40 percent of the Army's suicides in 2008 related to the escalations in Iraq.

Of course, a cycle of continual deployments -- some have served four or more stretches in combat areas -- take their toll on soldiers, and shatter their families in ways different from the local families shattered by our bombs overseas.

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(Here is where a reinstated draft -- mandatory conscription -- would be honorable. It would help ease the burden of repeated deployments shared by a tiny segment of the country, the volunteer-military, and instead share the burden and risk across a much wider national population.

But, then, that is all The Powers learned from Vietnam: *Whatever you do, don't have a draft or the People will start refusing to fight, especially after all the wealthy and well-connected start rocking the boat, their own precious sons and daughters commanded to fight and die, too.*
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You may have heard nearly half of all veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan are seeking compensation for injuries suffered there -- more than twice the level of the Gulf War (the first one) vets.

If you're keeping score, here is a rough breakout of injuries claimed by returning vets, war by war: World War II and Korea, 2; Vietnam, 3 to 4; recent vets, 8 to 9. In the last year, that number has jumped again, now ranging from 11 to 14 injuries each. *Each*.

On any given night, 76-thousand veterans are homeless. The head of the VA has pledged to reduce the number of homeless vets in 2012 from 131-thousand *down to* 59-thousand.

Meanwhile, veteran unemployment rates run in the range of 10 or 12 percent for those who have served since September, 2011. Calculating the number for all vets is much more difficult, as many have given up and are no longer officially counted. By some reports, as many are excluded as are counted in.

Many questions beg to be asked in life, and here is one of them: Since when is a reduction to "**only**"

59-thousand veterans a potential cause for future celebration? As long as we are asking questions: Since when -- and why -- have we been reduced to such small, scanty, scaled-back dreams in America?

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Time out. Let's try to not add insult to injury by being willfully ignorant. If we spend trillions a year on war while simultaneously slashing taxes on callous companies and favored cronies most able to pay, let's not feign surprise when the social-spending cupboards are found to be pillaged, shredded, and stripped bare.

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"Support Our Troops," a motto seen on magnetic yellow ribbons plastered is a noble and, I would hope, earnest expression of patriotic feeling, even if overly narrow in outlook.

You probably have no idea what I would give -- which specific organs, that is -- to see an equal number of yellow magnetic ribbons on parade, proclaiming just as loudly and proudly, "Support Our Veterans."

Somehow, people forget that veterans were once the very same "Troops" people were so eager and earnest to support.

While we're at it, being fantasy job creators in the burgeoning yellow magnetic ribbon industry, let's add in one or two more. A couple come to mind: There's the old "Give Peace a Chance," as a nice change -- both topical and retro. If that one is too bold in this day and age, there is this one, too: "Give All Life a Chance, for a Change."

There could be a version for those who vigorously espouse and proudly strut their religious natures, too: "Give All Life a Chance, for Heaven's Sake."

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Yes, of course -- to state the obvious, these are thoughts of merely one veteran, and are only one set of scribbles plucked from the vast seas of people who have served. Unless drafted, we all served for a variety of reasons -- some true, some hollow, some false.

Unremarkably, not one of those reasons for serving included laying down our lives in order to lay a foundation for an annual, Fabulous Memorial Day Blowout and Inventory Reduction Sale,

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nor a ten-second, yawning clip on the news.

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Postscript: Even in my own very small community today, just moments ago, we experienced our yearly three seconds of shrieking flyover by military jet -- a holiday recipe repeated, no doubt, at some not-insignificant cost, coast to coast:

Take some chest-beating, mixed with macho hot-rodding, add some extract of sweat-blood-and-tears, then fold in a little more failing memory, and there you go -- a nice Warmonger's Casserole, a reminder of where our tax dollars really roll up their sleeves and go to work at this Memorial Day picnic.

Recipe serves just a few, way up at the top.

http://hosted.ap.org/dynamic/stories/U/US_COMING_HOME_NEW_VETERANS?SITE=AP&SECTION=HOME&TEMPLATE=DEFAULT

<http://abcnews.go.com/Health/study-80-percent-army-suicides-start-iraq-war/story?id=15872301#.T8O5965rklc>

http://www.usatoday.com/news/military/2010-01-12-four-army-war-tours_N.htm

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<http://www.endhomelessness.org/section/issues/veterans>

<http://www.bls.gov/news.release/vet.nr0.htm>