

# Memorial Day Address

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Good Morning. I am honored and humbled to serve as the Memorial Day speaker. Thank you, Mayor Gowing for this invitation and your gracious introduction. I grew up in the Cottage Grove area and my earliest memories of this memorial weekend were formed around visits with family or watching my next door neighbor hold quiet gatherings in his back yard, and maybe a trip to the lake. As I got older, it was more about cookouts, visiting family, and the unofficial start of summer. I graduated from Cottage Grove High School in 1979. It wasn't until I left to go to basic training in 1982, I gained a sense, and begin to understand the true meaning of Memorial Day. I served as an officer in the Army from June of 1985 to July of 2015. During this time Cottage Grove Oregon was my home of record.

You may already know about Decoration Day, which followed an American Civil War tradition of placing flowers on the gravesites of soldiers—both Union and Confederate—killed in military service. One hundred years later in 1967, Memorial Day it became a federal holiday by a joint congressional resolution and was made law in 1971.

Over the course of my military career, I have attended many memorials and funerals, and I have visited numerous military cemeteries around the world for multiple countries. I have seen the American Flag placed to honor those who had fallen while in uniform or who had died after their time of service to our country.

I have been to the National Cemetery at the Gettysburg Battlefield where President Abraham Lincoln gave his 1863 address to honor those who “gave the last full measure of devotion” so that our Nation would remain true to its founding principles and secure its citizens’

rights to Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness. I have been to the cemeteries in Frankfurt and Heidelberg Germany where members of the American Legion, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, and the Boy Scouts still ensure that the graves of U.S. military veterans are appropriately distinguishable with an American Flag, even while on foreign soil.

The Secretary of the Army this year wrote.

Our nation owes a debt to its fallen heroes that we can never fully repay. For all of us who walk in the footsteps of those who have gone before us, it is our responsibility, our duty, and even our privilege to honor their sacrifice. Today we commemorate our country's most solemn national day of remembrance - Memorial Day. We honor the men and women of our military who have made the ultimate sacrifice in service to our country.

When a serviceman or woman signs into the service, whether it was by Draft, Volunteer or being told to volunteer, that individual wrote a blank check in service to their country, whose term of service can be extended for the duration plus one year of any War time emergency.

But back to those quiet gatherings next door on South River Road, and my neighbor, I asked him one day who were all the men were at his house who showed up a once a year, and he told me at the age of 17, the Pearl Harbor Survivors Association. When I was 20 in 1981, I had an assignment to do an oral history interview for Lane Community College. I asked my neighbor to tell me about his experiences on 7 December 1941. I no longer have that cassette tape, based on my memory of 39 years ago, and research of events, that Sailor served aboard the USS Ward.,

DD 139 a Wickes class Destroyer from World War One. Named after the First Navy Officer killed in the US Civil War.

On the morning of 7 December 1941, *Ward* was conducting a precautionary patrol off the entrance to Pearl Harbor, when she was informed at 03:57 by visual signals from the coastal minesweeper *Condor* of a periscope sighting, whereupon USS *Ward* began searching for the contact, my neighbor, one of several sailors on the bridge that morning, was on watch on the bridge. At about 06:37, the USS *Ward* sighted a periscope apparently tailing the cargo ship *Antares* whereupon she attacked the target. The target sunk, a two-man midget submarine, thus *Ward* caused the first American-caused casualties of World War II a few hours before Japanese carrier aircraft bombed in or near targets in Honolulu. My Neighbor survived the attack on Pearl Harbor, as did his ship being ordered back to sea for week, as early warning for a potential second attack by the Japanese Navy. After things settled down at Pearl Harbor, he was given an award, promoted a rank, and demoted a rank for something he had done. He said the old man was not happy about demoting him, and my neighbor wasn't mad because that was the Navy, and that is the way things were done. He would not tell me what got him demoted, as it was between him and the Captain (this was almost 40 years later). He was later assigned as an division chief of small boats (LSTs) for the rest of Pacific campaign with the LT (JG) who got in trouble with him. He talked to several former students after graduating from High School about sights, sounds and smells of the carnage of beach assaults, and bringing in assault troops to the beach while the bodies floated in the surf, taking wounded back to ships with aid stations. But during the war, he said he always did his job, because that was the way things were done. His experiences in war were never talked about in class or during our time at High School, and most

would have never guessed our High School teacher was a War Veteran. He didn't view himself as a hero, only a sailor who had done his job. Pearl Harbor was a devastating time in our history, not to mention 4 more years in the Pacific theater campaign.

My next door Neighbor was Joe King, a driver's Ed teacher, my summer boss working school maintenance. Joe King wrote a check out to the United States of America before WW2 started and served throughout World War Two. He did his job on Dec 7, 1941 and the four years that followed, and served his country honorably throughout the war. During the 70s at CGHS many of the teachers, Custodians and maintenance workers were veterans, several WW2, some Korean War veterans, several Vietnam veterans that I knew of. Our community has veterans all through it. While I was away, Joe King died.

I looked for person to talk of this memorial day of the Soldiers, Sailors, Marines and Airmen and Coast Guard, who I served with, or whom had died during Panama, The First Gulf War, Somalia, the Second Gulf war, Afghanistan and then back to Iraq. Not mention those that died in other conflicts Peacekeeping, Peace enforcement, Humanitarian Assistance, or Security Assistance, during my time in Service. I choose a man who has died during peace, but served his country well during Second World War from our community, may he and others not be forgotten.

Those we memorialize on Memorial Day, some will fade in time from Cottage Grove and the surrounding community when families move, or the fallen perhaps were the only sons or daughters, they slip from our memory. I would encourage you to examine the multiple lists of

War casualties for Lane County for WW1, WW2, Korea, Vietnam, you will see family names you recognize from places like Dorena, Diston, Culp Creek, Blue Mountain, Cottage Grove, London, Saginaw and other communities of South Lane County. I would urge you to take the time if you know someone from our community that died or was wounded during war or service to our country, that they are accurately reflected in the data maintained by the Lane county vital statistics division. They should never be forgotten, as they have made the ultimate sacrifice to allow us to continue live with the rights and privileges we enjoy. I again would thank for Mayor Gowing's invitation and surrounding community leaders for the opportunity to speak to all of you during your time today commemorate our country's most solemn national day of remembrance - Memorial Day.