



The American Cemetery in Normandy, just east of Omaha Beach. Thousands of Americans perished in the Normandy Invasion. Image online via Wikimedia Commons.

*Not only are they commemorated
by columns and inscriptions,
but there dwells also an unwritten memorial of them,
graven not on stone but in the hearts of men.*

Pericles, Athenian Leader
On Remembering Those
Who Fought and Died for their Country

In the spring, when flowers are in bloom throughout the United States, Americans decorate the graves of military men and women who died fighting for their country.

No one is exactly sure when "Decoration Day" first started, but the first official observance at Arlington Cemetery took place three years after the Civil War was over. On the 5th of May, in 1868, Maj. Gen. John A. Logan declared that May 30th would be a day to honor the dead.

Urging citizens to use "the choicest flowers of springtime," Logan reminded everyone to not let the graves of servicemen slip into disrepair:

We should guard their graves with sacred vigilance. ... Let pleasant paths invite the coming and going of reverent visitors and fond mourners.

Let no neglect, no ravages of time, testify to the present or to the coming generations that we have forgotten as a people the cost of a free and undivided republic.



This gravesite, for an unknown soldier, is located at the Manila American Cemetery in the Philippines. In 1971, Congress declared that “Memorial Day” would be a national holiday which occurred on the fourth Monday of May (not on May 30th). Among other reasons, legislators wanted to give Americans a long weekend at the beginning of summer.

Veterans opposed that idea, declaring that if Memorial Day were part of a long weekend, it would turn-into a summer holiday where people focused on having fun instead of remembering, and honoring, those who had died.

How many Americans have given their lives for their country’s freedom, from the formation of the "United States" until now? Here are the approximate numbers from the major conflicts (with a separate listing for the War between the States):

- American Revolution: **4,435 deaths**; 6,188 wounded
- War of 1812: **2,260 deaths**; 4,505 wounded
- Mexican War: **13,283 Deaths**; 4,152 wounded
- U.S. Civil War: **620,000 deaths**; 476,000 wounded; 400,000 captured or missing
- Spanish-American War: **2,446 deaths**; 1,662 wounded
- World War I: **116,516 deaths**; 204,002 wounded
- World War II: **405,399 deaths**; 671,846 wounded
- Korean War: **36,574 deaths**; 103,284 wounded
- Vietnam War: **58,209 deaths**; 153,303 wounded
- Persian Gulf War (1990-91): **382 deaths**; 467 wounded
- “Global War on Terror,” including the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars:
+6,800 deaths; more than 970,000 disability claims registered as of March 31, 2014

By Memorial Day, 2015, at least 1,266,304 people had died fighting for America.

An emotional moment, at all military funerals, happens when a bugler plays the 24 notes of “Taps.” Listen to that music and learn about its history.

Another emotional moment happened, in 2014—during the 70th anniversary of D-Day—when an 11-year-old boy expressed his gratitude to the men who fought, and died, on Normandy’s beaches.

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Grave of an Unknown Soldier at the Manila American Cemetery

Image online via [American Battle Monuments Commission](#).

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