

## Memorial Day 2016: Earn This

Today, from about the First Gulf War forward, those that have not served in the military have adopted a respect for the patriotism of service by soldiers, regardless of the political objectives or controversies during the time of their service. It took a while to get to this deeper understanding, as an increasingly smaller proportion of the population serves in the military. Today, soldiers are celebrated not only in graduations at UNG, and in homecomings and deployments, but in the acknowledgement of public figures and everyday people alike who have served.

Growing up in the 70's, I remember the event of a memorial day parade where the local National Guard unit would roll their collection of Tanks, Jeeps and miscellaneous vehicles down main street, participating in parades in at least two local towns. That was a time when people did not feel so overwhelmed with getting by, thus devoting a little of your time to being in a parade was more of a welcome opportunity than a nagging additional duty. .

These days, most people, soldiers and civilians alike, just prefer to avoid the parking issues and take the day off. I believe it was Will Rogers who made the quip about Memorial Day, that as he saw it, "The soldiers should all stand in one place and the people should all walk by and salute". Maybe we need to approach this differently than either of these paradigms.

Memorial Day is not solely about honoring the dead, but also about acknowledging what would have been their wish. To quote a Civil War general, Oliver Holmes:

"Our dead brothers still live for us, and bid us think of life not death – of life to which their youth they lent the passion and joy of their spring. As I listen, the great chorus of life and joy begins again, and amid the awful orchestra of seen and unseen powers and destinies of good and evil, our trumpets sound once more a note of daring, hope, and will. The scope of this war was much greater than our most recent conflicts, in that it 2% of the US population was killed and virtually every family was touched by the war. That would be the equivalent of 6 million deaths today.

To quote a more current source, Tom Hanks in the movie "Saving Private Ryan" made a simple demand of the young private. A demand that is as relevant for those who served as those who supported them. It is as relevant today as in 1860 or before. It is a demand that I propose every soldier through the ages makes at his moment of sacrifice and that we should all try to deliver on collectively. This is a simple demand in its wording, and profound in its meaning. "Earn This." Earn it by giving meaning to their sacrifice when you see the Memorial Day markers by your commitment to justice, unity, and the well-being of our fellow Americans.