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SONS OF UNION VETERANS OF THE CIVIL WAR

MEMORIAL DAY May 2010

Consider a reading this GAR song as a poem, speech or singing it at your Memorial Day service:

THE FLAG THEY LOVED SO WELL

*Again the grass is growing green
Where sleep the noble brave
Again we come with fragrant flowers
To deck each hero's grave
In war they were their countries shield
And bore midst shot and shell
On many a crimsoned battlefield
The flag they loved so well*

*To battle forth in bands they went
From anvil, plow and loom
Old age and manhood's strength and prime
And youths fair morning bloom
They bore their countries flag aloft
And fighting for it fell
The stars and stripes, the honored flag
The flag the loved so well*

*Now comrades bring the garlands fair
That crown the smiling May
Where freely waves above their graves
The starry flag today
They speak about the bygone days
And of their comrades tell
Who battled to defend the flag
The flag they loved so well*

According to Webster's definition, "Memorial Day is a legal holiday in the U.S. (the last Monday in May in most states in memory of the dead servicemen of all wars."

Those of us familiar with the Civil War know it's a lot more. Not long after the Civil War ended, and the Grand Army of the Republic was organized, the adjutant general of the Grand Army of the Republic received a letter from a former Union army private living in Cincinnati. The Civil War veteran mentioned that in his native country of Germany there was a custom of scattering flowers on the graves of the dead. He suggested consideration of the practice for the Civil War dead.

According to an 1888 *History of the Grand Army of the Republic* the commander of the GAR was so impressed by the suggestion that he issued a general order proclaiming May 30, 1868, as America's first Memorial Day. General John A. Logan's General Order No. 11 dated May, 1868 is the basis for what we do today.

General Logan was born in Jackson City, Illinois and was one of Abraham Lincoln's "political generals". He attended Louisville University in Kentucky and served in the Mexican War as a 2nd lieutenant of Illinois volunteers. Before the Civil War he was a lawyer and was elected to the Illinois legislature as a Democrat. He was serving in the U. S. House of Representatives when the Civil War started, but resigned his seat and raised a regiment that joined Grant's army at Cairo. He was promoted to brigadier general in March of 1862 and to major general in November of 1862. In 1864 he commanded the XV Corps in the Atlanta Campaign and took command of the Army of the Tennessee when Major General James B. McPherson was killed.

After the Civil War he resumed his political career. This time serving as a Radical Republican in the U. S. House of Representatives. In 1871 he was elected a United States Senator. He was an unsuccessful candidate for vice president in 1884. He wrote two books: *The Great Conspiracy*, and *The Volunteer Soldier in America*. He died December 26, 1886 in the District of Columbia.

The world has turned many times since that first Decoration Day. General Logan and the members of the Grand Army of the Republic have faded into the past. But what we now call Memorial Day serves to connect us with our ancestors and our past better than any of the other patriotic holidays we observe.

The struggle for freedom continues and each passing generation has been asked to make the sacrifices necessary to preserve our Union and our freedom. So, it is understandable that we now associate Memorial Day with the dead of all wars and not just the Civil War. But, President Lincoln said it best in 1863: ". . . from these honored dead we take increased devotion to the cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion - - that here we highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain - - that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom - - and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the Earth."