

VILLAGE VIEW

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Memorial Day. At this time of year most of us honor the memory of those who gave their lives in the service of our country. To mark their sacrifice and give continued recognition, those of us who returned from wars and those of us who waited at home, parade and march, or are spectators.

Bands play stirring music; flags wave and snap in the wind; within each participant, whether marcher or bystander, rise mixed emotions. There is sadness for the waste of young lives, the shared grief with those whose loved ones fell, pride in the ultimate successes, acceptance of the inevitable losses.

You can't win them all; when you lose, the costs are high.

As the years pass and our country becomes embroiled in more wars, as the winds of social change bend our interpretations of morality and immorality, wars have come to be viewed as deplorable.

Diplomacy is the preferred alternative; diplomacy means negotiation, and negotiation means compromise, and compromise means giving up something in order to attain something else.

And while none of us wants to see war visited upon us or any other country, negotiation has its prices, as well. Since diplomacy between nations must be carried out between representatives of those nations, we as a people bear the consequences of the action of a handful of individuals attempting to bargain for the best deal and to give in, in return, on the least important details. Both sides, of course, dicker for the most advantageous position.

The result is often an agreement that pleases nobody. If one nation is reasonably satisfied, the other feels outmaneuvered. Furthermore, one person or a small group of people, end up making decisions and agreements that affect millions of their countrymen. To maintain world-wide equilibrium, and to retain the respect of other countries, honoring those commitments is a must.

If we make promises we don't keep, the other nations of the world will lose faith in us. Complicating this situation is our form of government, one of constant change in policy and even ideology. Our system assures that the government of the United States will be in a state of flux most of the time.

When the President of the United States is a Republican, he must lead the nation and honor promises made under a previous, often Democratic, administration; all too frequently he and his administration would have negotiated a different agreement, had they had that opportunity. The administration in the White House may not even appreciate fully the reasons behind some of the commitments it is honor-bound to uphold.

As our democracy matures, as modern transportation and communication systems shrink the world and bring every other country's battles, revolutions, skirmishes, wars civil and otherwise, into our living rooms with every news broadcast, we cannot but be impressed by our vulnerability to actions and re-actions no matter where on our planet they occur.

On this Memorial Day we owe homage to those who have fallen in wars. The men who died in the War of Independence, two hundred years ago, whether Red Coats or Colonists, had no desire to die, nor did participants in the War of 1812. Those who marched to battle during the Civil War were not suicidal. When Teddy Rossevelt led his Rough Riders up San Juan Hill, not a man among them hoped for glory in death.

In 1917 when the USA entered the First World War, the war to end all wars as it was called, every doughboy hoped to make it home again. World War II's G.I.s prayed for survival though four long years. Some made it; some didn't.

Then there was the distant Korean War; and more recently, that in Vietnam. Did the men lost in those wars give up their lives willingly? Certainly not.

Whether we believe war is inevitable or not, whether we agree with some sociologists who hold that it's part of the nature of homo sapiens to engage in wars, or whether we believe we can solve problems diplomatically, we owe to all who lot their lives in wars a moment of respect each year. It matters not whether they were American lives that were wasted or lives of people of other countries.

To each individual his own life is sweet, just as each of us clings with faith to the belief he will wake to tomorrow's dawn and that the dawning of another day will bring something better than the bad days that have past.

Because this is Memorial Day, the 30th of May, 1980, and because this is the year's most promising and most tender season, let your thoughts turn to those who didn't live to witness another spring because enemy bullets wiped away their lives.

The veterans will march, the bands will play, the flags will flutter. Speeches will be made, bugle will call. You may prefer to play golf. Or weed the garden. Or watch the Parade of Tall Ships sail into Boston Harbor.

The veterans will review the months and years they spent in uniform, remember their comrades, recall both the horrors and the humors they shared. The bands will make martial music and the drums will rattle their cadences. The bright flags will fly and dip and be saluted. Hearts will swell to the sights and sounds.

The speeches will repeat, as such have always done, the love for and the loss of brothers unforgotten. The clear notes of "Taps" will fade away, once more. A few will place flowers at the headstones in the cemetery.

Whatever you chose to do on this Memorial Day, please pause for a moment, and remember all those who have given their lives in wars. And let their memory serve to influence your thinking when you express your opinions about how our country should handle international crises.

War and its inevitable losses and costs or diplomacy and its inevitable compromises; either can have positive as well as negative effects on our own personal lives. For future years may we be blessed with leaders of great powers of persuasion, of wisdom, of resourcefulness, of foresight and of moral and physical strength and courage.

Whether we like it or not, whatever happens anywhere on this globe will have, to a certain and sure degree, some effect upon everyone of us, just as in the past, people everywhere have been touched by decisions made by men half-way around the world.