

# Memorial Day: This is Important to Me



# Memorial Day: This is Important to Me

By Michael N. Schulman, Col. USAF (Ret)

## **On Memorial Day - SAY THEIR NAMES!**

Through the years pass quicker with every one, I pray that I will always remember that I am honor bound to pay tribute to the brothers in arms I lost over my 26 years of service. I implore you to read the graphic below - and remember that THIS weekend is all about those who gave up their civilian status, put on a uniform, took an oath and kept it - and in so doing sacrificed their lives for our nation.

"All gave some . . . but SOME GAVE ALL!" That concept was made real to me again and again.

On Memorial Day, our grateful nation remembers those who laid down their lives in the service of the United States wearing the US Army, Navy, Coast Guard and Air Force uniform. From the depths of my soul, I believe it is an egregious slight to those who sacrificed their lives – and the loved ones they left behind - to conflate the three service related days of remembrance. Each holiday has a different name – and (by federal statute) a different purpose.

This weekend – especially Monday - I think of seven special people I was privileged to serve with - who are in that group who made the ultimate sacrifice. Specifically, I solemnly remember:

- ★ 1Lt Bob Witt - 1975 (killed in a KC-135 Crash in Michigan).
- ★ 1Lt Lauren Ginter - 1981 (killed in an RC-135 crash in Alaska).
- ★ Capt Jim McGregor - 1981 (killed in a B52 Crash in Colorado).

- ★ SSGT Greg "Red" Fronius- 1987 (assassinated in El Salvador, through the perfidy of the spy Ana Montes).
- ★ LtCol Jim Basile - 1987 (killed in a UH-1H Crash in El Salvador).
- ★ LTC David Pickett - 1991 (executed in cold blood by FMLN guerrillas after his UH-1H was shot down by a ground-to-air missile in El Salvador).
- ★ MSgt Joseph Beard - 1992 (sucked out of USAF C-130 flying at 20,000 feet off the coast of Peru and never recovered - following a strafing attack by Peruvian fighters).

I also remember good friends who died in conflicts while serving as contractors and "Other Government Agency" employees. Some were "seconded" to those agencies with a promise of return to active duty . . . but never made it back. Their names are seldom spoken. They never told.

I'm profoundly saddened as I think of the joys, passions and great accomplishments all of them would have known. I cry for their families - doing without them all these years. I thank them for the sacrifice they willingly made.

THEY ARE NOT FORGOTTEN.... AND THEY MUST NOT BE FORGOTTEN! Because THIS is where the "honor and principle" part comes in.

My friends listed above – and many more soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines I KNOW OF made the brave decisions that put them in the way of mortal danger based on a social compact they consider sacred. It is a 7- pointed compact based on a personal belief that:

1. IF a warrior is called, he (or she) answers that call without hesitation or fear.
2. IF a warrior is sent into harm's way, his (or her) service and country send them well trained and equipped – and only because it is necessary. They will not be abandoned or betrayed.
3. IF a warrior is sent he or she will do their best to complete the mission -and they will NEVER let their failure cost the lives of their teammates.

4. It is better to die in a righteous fight than be dishonored by cowardice or unprofessional performance. Failing your teammates, service and country is not an easy thing to live with.
5. We will all die one day. A glorious day is always a good day to die should that be a warrior's fate.
6. IF that day comes, any family a warrior leaves behind will be taken cared for by G\*d, country, service and respected by comrades in arms and members of their community.
7. The warrior's death will mean something to those who they love and trust. Their sacrifice will NOT be in vain and will not soon be forgotten.

Every point of this compact is critical. We do not live in a suicidal culture. We sacrifice when it is unavoidable. Our warriors are neither mindless nor irrational. We create a state of mind which enables them to believe they can succeed on missions that others would not even consider. Start removing points of this compact and the mindset evaporates. Heroism dies. Victory evaporates.

The damage doesn't stop there. The core values of Western Democracies are personal responsibility, self sacrifice, trust in and respect for its citizens. These values have been under attack for decades. The warrior is most frequently the model we offer to our young as to why good people trust, respect and sacrifice. History is replete with examples of empires and countries that have fallen from the highest heights to total dysfunction when governments and/or key leaders breach the trust of their common citizens and their military.

We do not have "Remembrance Laws" in the US like the ancient Greeks did. Nor do we have orators like Pericles to teach and inspire the citizenry to keep the compact with their fallen warriors – and their mourning families. But it is still worth reading what Thucydides reports Pericles said in his "Funeral Oration For The Dead from the Peloponnesian War" . . . or you could

read President Lincoln's "Gettysburg Address" (a shortened and modernized version of Pericles' speech) . . . OR you can just trust me, take my word for it, and do the right thing. Remember the fallen on Memorial Day!

MNS, USAF (Ret)



**Michael N. Schulman** was commissioned in the United States Air Force in October of 1972. He retired in August of 1998 holding the grade of Colonel. In his 26 years of active service, he served as a Navigator/ Electronic Warfare Officer, an Intelligence Officer and an Avionics Maintenance Officer. He held command positions at the Flight, Squadron, Group and Wing level. He also served as a Joint Staff Officer. He flew over 4000 hrs as an aircrew member on B-52, RC-135, T-43, C-130 and C-27 aircraft. After the 9/11 terrorist attack, he returned to Federal service as a Dept of the Air Force Civilian. He subsequently held [Senior Executive Service](#) positions as the Deputy Director of Intelligence at HQ USSOUTHCOM and HQ USSTRATCOM. Since his retirement in 2012, he has authored two books on hiking, biking, and kayaking in Florida. See his website at [treasuresofthetrails.com](http://treasuresofthetrails.com).