

## MEMORIAL DAY 2014 Reflections by Mayor Thomas P. Schneider

It is an honor to address you this special morning on this important occasion. The meaning of this Memorial Day is personally poignant, it is the first since taking my little brother Jim to Jefferson Barracks last summer to join our Father, four uncles, two aunts, my best man, and many other friends.

This Vietnam Memorial is a special place where veterans of all Wars and citizens have remembered our fallen comrades for over 40 years. Many more should come, but we few, we solemn few, we band of brothers and sisters; we muster now to pay homage. On this obelisk are the names of those who gave the ultimate sacrifice in the Vietnam War including that of Michael Blassie whose remains continued to serve our nation after his death while interred in the Vietnam Tomb with the unknown soldiers from WW1, WW2, and the Korean War.

Modern DNA science identified him and he was returned to his Florissant family for a very large funeral at what is now St. Rose Philippine Duchesne Church. Lt. Blassie is now at rest at Jefferson Barracks where today there is a flag upon his grave as there is row upon row and upon the grave of my Dad, my Brother, our uncles, aunts, fathers, mothers, sisters, grandparents and friends.

Memorial Day is a sacred event in our National collective consciousness started after our Civil War by laying flowers upon Union and Confederate graves alike. . . With the shocking number of casualties of both North and South, a new theme of death, sacrifice and rebirth entered deep into every soul. People of all religions and Nationalities joined together, and the point was often made that the Northerner, the Rebel, the German, like my own Great Grandfather, the Irish, the mosaic of soldiers from both sides had become true Americans in those "baptisms of blood" on Civil War battlefields.

General Grant warned that the brute ferocity of both sides meant that future foes of the preserved Union would be severely punished. In every challenge since, the best of each generation of citizens have been willing to go in harm's way and suffer baptisms of Blood to validate this American Republic and its spirit of freedom and democracy.

The faith based desire to carry out God's will on earth is a theme that lies deep in the United States tradition especially in our military branches of the Army, Air force, Navy, Marines, and Coast Guard. Memorial Day gives a ritual of expression to this sentiment with local community gatherings like this one joining in a sense of national reflection.

This collective American remembrance is different from similar ones in France Britain and Russia in that we embrace our diversity of faiths. Americans borrow from different religious traditions and we see no conflict with having deep levels of faith and great love and devotion to our country and its goals of promoting self-governance as a way to provide the most liberty and opportunity for mankind.

The half-staff position of the Flags today is a symbol to remember more than one million men and women who have given their lives in service of this country. When the flag goes up, their memory is raised by us the living, we resolve not to let their noble sacrifice be in vain, but rather pledge to rise up in their place and even to rejoice when our children and grandchildren continue the fight for liberty and justice for all.

July 28 in two months marks the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the beginning of World War I in 1914. The blood flowed until the 11<sup>th</sup> hour of the 11<sup>th</sup> day of the 11<sup>th</sup> month of 1918. June 6 next week marks the 70th anniversary of the 1944 D Day Normandy invasion to liberate Nazi occupied Europe. The blood flowed in that war from 1939 until Japan surrendered to the Allies aboard the USS Missouri in Tokyo Bay on Sept 2, 1945. Happy were they who saw the Battleship Mighty MO that day.

To give dimension to a time of global wars and depression, consider that the period of time between the beginning of the First World War and the end of the second was just over 31 years, a year less than the time I served on the City Council from 1979 to 2011. Today's times are tough, no question. But to help today's young civilians cope it might be wise for them to pause and look back to generations that endured two world wars, winters in Korea, summers in Vietnam and too many trips to the middle east to help them put things in perspective.

We are the mightiest Nation the World has ever seen but unlike other powerful nations throughout history we are not conquerors. We only ask for enough land to bury our dead. Buried in European soil are over a hundred thousand Americans who died in two World Wars who never had the chance to become fathers and grandfathers. Their graves are marked by crosses, crescents and stars of David row on row like at Arlington and in the poem by Canadian Lt. Col John McCrae composed in 1915 in a field near Flanders Belgium.

*In Flanders fields the poppies blow  
Between the crosses, row on row  
That mark our place; and in the sky  
The larks, still bravely singing, fly  
Scarce heard amid the guns below.*

*We are the Dead..... Short days ago  
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,  
Loved and were loved,.. and now we lie  
In Flanders fields.*

*Take up our quarrel with the foe:  
To you from failing hands we throw  
The torch; be yours to hold it high.  
If ye break faith with us who die  
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow  
In Flanders fields.*

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Jefferson Barracks will have their largest turnout of visitors today after boy scouts honored each grave with a small National ensign. Feelings that well up every time I go there have been stronger since my brother passed and since these feelings are always magnified every time I have gone on Memorial Day going there later gives me pause.

Dare I visit them this special day, with countless flags on proud display?  
Been there for Uncles, Aunts, Friends and Dad, feeling proud yet also sad  
Ok Jim, you know I'll go, but you left too soon my little Bro!

We are truly blessed to live in this Patriotic, Faith based community and On behalf of the Florissant City Council, Judge Boyle, Chief Lowery and the men and women of our Police Department, all of our devoted employees and the Citizens of Florissant I would like to take this opportunity to thank each and every one of you for your service to our Nation, for your commitment to our fellow veterans and for your continued work to make Florissant the Beautiful City. Thank you.