

Memorial Day Observance  
Panicaro Park  
May 26, 2008

Remarks by Mayor Edward P. Zimmerman

Good Morning. Memorial Day is the time for us as Americans to honor our history and core values by remembering those who gave their lives for the ideals we so cherish. There is arguably no greater sacrifice one can make than to die for another. And so through the years and wars, Americans have never ceased to honor those who gave all.

When he dedicated the battlefield at Gettysburg in 1863, Lincoln spoke of the inadequacy of words on occasions such as these: "The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here."

And so it is with us today. The eloquence of words cannot match the power of the sacrifices made by so many. We honor them. We praise them. We remember them.

More than a million American service members have died in the wars and conflicts this nation has fought since it was founded. Each person who died during those conflicts was a loved one cherished by family and friends. Each was a loss to their community and to their nation. They gave the ultimate sacrifice so that we and others may enjoy freedom and liberty. To them, we owe everything.

The Borough of Rocky Hill has lost its share of sons to the ravages of war and today we are here to honor their memory on this Memorial Day.

We honor them today by placing this wreath and remembering all they have done and know they gave themselves for the good of people they didn't know and never met and we, the future generations, are better for their sacrifice.

The observance of this day started 1863 and was borne of true compassion. As the Civil War was being fought, loved ones were cleaning confederate soldiers' graves in Columbus, Mississippi, placing flowers on them. They noticed nearby the union soldiers' graves, dusty, overgrown with weeds. Grieving for their own fallen soldiers, the confederate women understood that the dead union soldiers buried nearby were the cherished loved ones of families and communities far away. They cleared the brush and mud from those graves as well as their own soldiers' graves and laid flowers on them too.

Soon the tradition of a "Decoration Day" for the graves of fallen soldiers spread. In 1882, the nation observed its first official Memorial Day, a day set aside to remember and honor the sacrifice of those who died in all our nation's wars. May was chosen because that was the most likely time for all of the flowers to be in full bloom.

For years, Memorial Day was a day in our nation when stores closed and communities gathered together for a day of parades and other celebrations with a patriotic theme. Memorial Day meant ceremonies at cemeteries around the country, speeches honoring those who gave their lives, the laying of wreaths.

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In some places, even though this has become a shopping, vacation and even graduation weekend, these ceremonies continue, as we see here. This is the true meaning of Memorial Day. You truly honor our fallen comrades by your presence. You honor the ideals and values those soldiers stood for and died defending.

There are many who may disagree with the reasons for some wars and the tactics of others. There are those who are adamantly opposed to the war we are currently fighting. They have that right because of those who have fought for their freedom in the past and we honor here today. They need to remember that the soldiers do not decide policy, they are ordered into harms way and perform in ways that make us proud. And whether one agrees or disagrees with the reason for war, those who have died in combat did so heroically and with honor, paying the ultimate price for their country and our liberty. We in this country owe a great debt of gratitude to those who sacrificed their lives so that we could live free. We can start to pay that debt by not forgetting, by remembering what they did and what they stood for. I think Jared may have referred to this same passage last year, but because it is so fitting I would like to use it again.

Please listen to these words by Charles M. Province:

"It is the Soldier, not the reporter,  
Who has given us Freedom of the Press.  
It is the Soldier, not the poet,  
Who has given us Freedom of Speech.  
It is the Soldier, not the campus organizer,  
Who has given us the Freedom to demonstrate.  
It is the Soldier, not the lawyer,  
Who has given us the right to a fair trial;  
And it is the Soldier--who salutes the flag,  
Who serves the flag, and  
Whose coffin is draped by the flag--  
Who allows the protester to burn the flag."

Please join me in a moment of silence as we all remember those soldiers who have made the ultimate sacrifice on our behalf.

This Memorial Day and every day...

May we never forget those who died...

May we never fail to live up to their standard...

And may we never lose sight of what they sacrificed for...

May God bless you all and may God bless America.