

## Memorial Day 2020

Some might expect me to wax eloquent about the ongoing pandemic, corona virus, or COVID19; those expectations will not be met. There are countless other experts, self-styled and otherwise, who are continuously pontificating ad nauseum about this dread disease and there is nothing meaningful I can add. I will provide my thoughts on what Memorial Day means to me, and to countless thousands like me.

All of us are steeped in freedom as part of our birthright and imbued with the phrase "Land of the Free." For most of two months now we have experienced a partial loss of freedoms we have come to regard as a natural part of our lives, being told we cannot go to work, cannot go to school, cannot go to church. We cannot even gather with friends in groups larger than ten and then we must remain spaced six feet apart. This is all to accomplish the control of a disease; I hope that an unintended consequence of this curtailment of our activities will be a deeper appreciation of the freedoms we enjoy. I hope too that there will be a continued appreciation for those who were willing to raise their right hand and say "I solemnly swear that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic, and that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same, so help me God." Simple words carrying a powerful meaning. Admittedly, they are not words that can be used by all; there are a great many who are not cut out for military life, and that is as it should be. Military service is not a prerequisite to becoming a good American citizen; it might help, but there are countless thousands of truly great citizens who have never been a member of the U. S. Armed Forces. I know a lot of them personally.

I also know many hundreds personally who have raised their right hand and voluntarily served their country in the U. S. Armed Forces. The universal trait to be found among them is that they neither expect nor do they desire any special treatment because they served in the military. All they seek is a gentle appreciation for their service – no ticker tape parades, no grandstand ovations, none of that – only to be appreciated. I am, as many of you already know, a retired military man, veteran of more than thirty years in the U. S. Navy. In this part of the United States, more particularly in my home state of Wisconsin, I have never ever perceived myself as unappreciated. On any given day if I wear my ball cap that says "U. S. Navy – Retired" I will be thanked for my service. This frequently puts me at a loss for words, usually with a simple muttered response like "You're welcome." One lady recently went on to tell me she has a son in the Navy and where he is stationed. That was followed by the disclosure that she also has a son in the Air Force. I averred that she is indeed a military mother, at which she beamed. I have become acquainted with another lady locally who has sons in the military and she is rightfully proud to share that fact with interested parties. She has a right, nay, a duty to be proud.

One incontrovertible fact is that the longer one lives the more friends he loses. At this juncture in my life I am saddened by the loss of yet another friend with whom I have been acquainted and served with since January 1969. This friend was unique in that I served as one of his sideboys for his retirement ceremony in the summer of '69. He was a chief petty officer and the ceremony called for eight sideboys to help pipe him over the side. The sideboys were to be chief petty officer, but in our command, we had only seven chief petty officers. I solved the problem by volunteering myself as a sideboy. I was a lieutenant commander at the time but I had been a chief petty officer, up until the day I got commissioned ensign in January 1960; the Navy says "once a chief, always a chief," so I qualified myself to serve as senior sideboy. It was a simple act but one that was sincerely appreciated and never forgotten, discounting the last few months of his life when dementia removed many things from the memory bank.

My friend was born in 1926, lived in Oklahoma on a hard scrabble farm, grew up during the depression and joined the Army as soon as he was of age, serving out the end years of World War Two in the Philippines. With his time and duty served he went back to civilian life for a time, but soon joined the Navy, and there he stayed until his retirement with twenty honorable years of service. But he was not ready to quit just yet – he applied for and was accepted for work in the Federal Civil Service, and he stayed so employed until he again reached retirement age at 62. I haven't seen him since 1977, but time has never dimmed our bond of friendship. Something about two country bumpkins growing up at different times in different parts of the world, connected by a thread of service and appreciation for each other created a friendship that withstood disagreements on some things, but never on the big

things. His expression most used to describe a shipmate who died was to say “He walked the wind.” Now he has walked the wind and I miss having him around.

And that, my friends, is what Memorial Day is all about – remembering those who have done their part to maintain our freedoms, especially those who have walked the wind.

**Freedom Is Not Free**

**Frenchy Sends with Warm Regards**

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