

Some think Memorial Day is all about parades and BBQs, do you agree?

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Today many Americans think about Memorial Day as the holiday that marks the beginning of the summer season. The barbecues and parades that commonly take place over this long weekend are seen as a celebration in anticipation of vacations and nice weather. However, Memorial Day is a day that is supposed to be spent honoring fallen soldiers that have died in service to the nation. Sadly, too many citizens have lost sight of the meaning of this important observance.

Although the origins of Memorial Day are not clearly known, it began in the United States after the Civil War with a custom of decorating fallen soldiers' grave sites with flowers. It was once called Decoration Day for this reason. Families would gather to visit their fallen loved ones to pay respects and honor their service. But times have changed. The draft no longer exists, and no major wars have occurred in 50 years. Fewer people serve and most families have not been affected by war. Most people don't personally know anyone who has died in combat let alone serve overseas, so Memorial Day does not have the special meaning it once did for the general public. Which is why this day that is supposed to be spent honoring fallen soldiers, has turned into a day that is mainly used to relax and celebrate summer months.

Personally, I believe in spending Memorial Day commemorating soldiers that have died in combat. And while barbecues and parades are all fun and games, they don't specifically recognize the real meaning of the holiday. Unless those barbecues and/or parades are specifically targeting the honoring of the fallen, then it's completely plausible to attend or host one. But until then I have never- and don't think I ever will completely understand how barbecues and parades have come to be associated with a holiday that is supposed to be spent paying respects.

The reason why my perspective of Memorial Day may be different from an average American citizen may be because my whole life has revolved the military. My Grandfather, Mother, Father, and Brother all have served or are still serving in the United States Army. And although none of them have died in combat, I've always been aware of the great sacrifices one must make to be a part of this lifestyle. Years ago when I was a part of Girl Scouts, every Memorial Day we would walk through the cemetery at West Point, and place flags upon each gravestone along with flowers for the fallen soldiers. And sometimes I like to consider

myself lucky- being able to already have a well-rounded knowledge of what Memorial Day is and the correct way to spend it. And it's because of the family ties and participating in a foundation that values paying respect to those who've lost their lives in battle, I have been able to deepen my understanding of this holiday, which most Americans do not experience anymore.

Memorial Day is much more than barbeques and parades. While there is nothing wrong with celebrating the beginning of the summer, it should not be at the expense of honoring and remembering those who made the ultimate sacrifice for our freedom. Which also shows much Americans can take their freedom for granted in this country. So that is why I chose to spend my Memorial Day honoring all members of service that have fallen, over a barbecue or parade that pays little to no attention of the real meaning of the holiday at all.