

Welcome all. It is a pleasure to see so many of you turn out to honor and pay our respects to those who gave their lives while serving our country.

I am Lieutenant Colonel Barney Kemter US Army Retired and an alumnus of Hudson High School, Class of 1962. I shall do the math for you, I'm 77 years old.. Many of you may have seen my posts on the Facebook page "I grew up in Hudson". Now you have the opportunity to place a face to those postings. Some of you may recognize me from 5 years ago when I was here and was the featured speaker.

Today is Memorial Day. This is the day that we pay homage to all those who served in the military and didn't come home. This is not Veterans Day, it's not a celebration, it is a day of solemn contemplation over the cost of our freedom."

Memorial Day was born out of necessity. After the American Civil War, a battered United States was faced with the task of burying and honoring the 600,000 to 800,000 Union and Confederate soldiers who had died in the single bloodiest military conflict in American history. The first national commemoration of Memorial Day was held in Arlington National Cemetery on May 30, 1868, where both Union and Confederate soldiers were buried.

Several towns and cities across America claim to have observed their own earlier versions of Memorial Day or "Decoration Day" as early as 1866. (The earlier name is derived from the fact that decorating graves was and remains a central activity of Memorial Day.) But it wasn't until a remarkable discovery in a dusty Harvard University archive the late 1990s that historians learned about a Memorial Day commemoration organized by a group of freed black slaves less than a month after the Confederacy surrendered in 1865.

But in recent years the origins of how and where Decoration Day began has sparked lively debate among historians, with some, including Yale historian David Blight, asserting the holiday is rooted in a moving ceremony held by freed slaves on May 1, 1865, at the tattered remnants of a Confederate prison camp at Charleston's Washington Race Course and Jockey Club – today known as Hampton Park. The ceremony is believed to have included a parade of as many as 10,000 people, including 3,000 black schoolchildren singing the Union marching song "John Brown's Body" while carrying armfuls of flowers to decorate the graves.

More importantly than whether Charleston's Decoration Day was the first, is the attention Charleston's black community paid to the nearly 260 Union troops who died at the site. For two weeks prior to the ceremony, former slaves and black workmen exhumed the soldiers' remains from a hastily dug mass grave behind the race track's grand stand and gave each soldier a proper burial. They also constructed a fence to protect the site with an arch way at the entrance that read "Martyrs of the Race Course."

The dead prisoners of war at the race track must have seemed especially worthy of honor to the former slaves, Just as the former slaves had, the dead prisoners had suffered imprisonment and mistreatment while held captive by white southerners.

Not surprisingly, many white southerners who had supported the Confederacy, including a large swath of white Charlestonians, did not feel compelled to spend a day decorating the graves of their former enemies. It was often the African American southerners who perpetuated the holiday in the years immediately following the Civil War.

African Americans across the South clearly helped shape the ceremony in its early years, Without African Americans the ceremonies would have had far fewer in attendance in many areas, thus making the holiday less significant.

My generation grew up listening to the famous radio personality Paul Harvey. Paul would say at the end of his broadcast, "And now you know the rest of the story. And now you know the rest of the story about the origin of Memorial Day.

If you visited the moving tribute to the fallen Heros from Hudson on what we old timers call the village green, all the men shared this oath and obligation;

"I do solemnly swear that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; and that I will obey the orders of the President of the United States and the orders of the officers appointed over me, according to regulations and the Uniform Code of Military Justice. So help me God.

It is a gift or pledge of their lives to the United States of America. That oath is a major part of who we are in the military. It forms the bedrock of what we stand for and are willing to fight for.

The oath fully embraces what we do and we let them guide our military service.

I distinctly remember being administered that oath 56 years ago, almost as if it was just yesterday. I was in Cleveland going through my preparations to enlist in the U.S. Army. I stood in a room with at least 40 or 50 other people, all standing at what we called "attention," facing the front of the room. An officer entered and said he was going to administer the Oath of Enlistment to all of us. At this point, I had never heard the words so I had no idea as to what we were going to say.

We raised our right hands, as he asked us to, and began to recite after him. It seemed as if time stood still, because I mentally paused and reflected on the words I was repeating. I thought to myself this is not a joke - this is real.

As soon as he had administered the Oath of Enlistment, I immediately felt a strong sense of patriotism. I felt as if I was invincible. Don't laugh. I'm not sure why, but I was young, I really felt a sense of belonging to something bigger than myself.

I thought, I could very well die. I would be defending the framework and the beliefs of a nation. I would do so against all enemies meaning I might have to fight to save my life, or another's, or our way of life. I might have to do it far removed from the safety of our country - but the country would be safe, or so I thought.

I chose to join the military and part of making that official is the oath - the promise we make to be a part of this elite group of Americans. We made that oral commitment so all will know what our country means to us and what we will do to defend it, its values, and the right to our way of life.

We are here today to pay tribute to those who freely took this oath and ultimately gave their lives. Part of the Memorial Day celebration is a period of silence and reflection at 3 PM. Please join with me at that time in remembering these young men whom I personally knew that were a part of my generation who answered their country's calling:

Marine Corp 2d Lt. Ronald Davidson

Marine Corp 1st Lt. Jerry Gorney

Navy Commander John D. Peace, III

Air Force Captain Joseph Resato

Army Sergeant Armor Wilcox, III

From Peninsula were 2 people who attended Hudson High School:

Army Sergeant Joseph Sobczak

Army Captain Thomas Shafer.

I am a soldier.

I do not choose the time or the place

Convenience is not in my vocabulary

I stand at the ready

When my orders come, I go.

I am a soldier.

I may not see a child born,

A wife, a husband, parents, friends, I may never see them again.

But willingly and with conviction I go

I am a soldier

The job that I'm given to do

I will do even if it costs me my life.

I will do it.

I am a soldier.

A car approaches, a bicycle, a cart

I fix my stare and hone my senses

I have but a short time to take action

But I show restraint, it is part of my job

I am a soldier.

I repair hospitals, schools and homes

I help rebuild smiles for people that I've never met before

This too is part of my job

I am a soldier.

I gaze at those around me
In a foreign land I see a child
A wife a husband, parents, friends
Oh how I wish I were home
Oh how I wish they were mine
I am a soldier

Yes, take me home, but only when the job is done
Only when the job is done
I am a soldier

Thank you for your participation today. God bless you and God bless America.