

MEMORIAL DAY

In the years following the Civil War, it was customary to honor veterans who had died during the war by placing flowers upon their graves. In 1868, the Grand Army of the Republic, the Union veterans' organization, called for May 30 to be celebrated as a day to decorate "the graves of comrades who died in defense of their country during the late rebellion." This day became known as Decoration Day. However, in 1882, the Grand Army of the Republic suggested that the name be changed to Memorial Day. After World War I, the day was expanded to include the war dead from all of America's wars.

Today, the holiday is celebrated on either May 30 or the last Monday in May, and observed in every country where American soldiers are buried. Flags fly at half-mast, citizens parade, and special services at Arlington National Cemetery and the Vietnam War Memorial honor our Nation's heroes.



MEMORIAL DAY TRIVIA

Did you know that:

Although a number of places have claimed to be the first to celebrate Memorial Day, Congress has recognized Waterloo, New York, as the holiday's official birthplace. The whole town took part in the celebration on May 5, 1866.

Several Southern states celebrate Confederate Memorial Day honoring the soldiers they lost during the Civil War.



THE FIRST DIVISION MONUMENT

Following World War I, the Society of the First Division (a veterans' organization), built a memorial in Washington D.C. dedicated to all the First Division soldiers who gave their lives during that war. Completed in 1924, the monument consists of a tall granite column built on a massive granite base and topped by an eighteen foot tall bronze statue of the winged goddess of Victory. Inscribed in the base of the monument are the names of the First Division soldiers that died during the Great War.

Over the years, two special terraces were added to the west and east of the original monument. At the end of each of these terraces is a low stone wall on which bronze plaques are mounted. They bear the names of the First Division soldiers who died in World War II and Vietnam.

Monument Trivia

Did you know that:

The statue of Victory is covered with twenty carat gold and was designed by the American sculptor, Daniel Chester French. The monument itself was designed by Cass Gilbert.

The monument stands eighty-feet tall and the granite blocks from which it was constructed weigh anywhere from five to twenty-seven tons. The granite column itself weighs fifty-eight tons.

The First Division Museum at Cantigny has a maquette (artist's model) of the statue of Victory in its collection.

Reunion of the Society of the First Division gathered in front of the 1st Division Monument in Washington, D.C., July 22, 1930.

