

REP. TOM TANGRETTI
MEMORIAL DAY SPEECH
MAY 25, 1998

THANK YOU FOR INVITING ME TO
SPEAK HERE TODAY ~~AT POST XXX'S~~
MEMORIAL DAY SERVICE. IT IS BOTH
AN HONOR AND A PRIVILEGE FOR ME TO
BE HERE TODAY.

ALL ACROSS THE COUNTRY -- IN
COMMUNITIES LIKE OURS -- MANY
AMERICANS CELEBRATE MEMORIAL
DAY AS A "DAY OFF FROM WORK" BY
GATHERING WITH FAMILY AND FRIENDS
AT PICNICS, BALLGAMES AND
FESTIVALS.

HOWEVER, THOSE OF YOU HERE
WITH ME REALIZE THAT TODAY IS MUCH
MORE IMPORTANT -- TODAY WE GATHER

TO HONOR THE MEN AND WOMEN WHO
GAVE THEIR LIVES FOR DEMOCRACY
AND FREEDOM.

OUR HISTORY BOOKS ARE FULL OF
STORIES ABOUT BRAVE SOLDIERS
FIGHTING WARS IN THE NAME OF
FREEDOM, FROM THE AMERICAN
REVOLUTION TO THE MOST RECENT
CONFLICTS AROUND THE WORLD
TODAY.

EVERY GENERATION HAS
ANSWERED THE CALL TO ARMS – OUR
CONTINUED FREEDOM IS TESTAMENT
TO THAT FACT. AND BECAUSE TURMOIL
CONTINUES AROUND THE WORLD, MANY
OTHERS WILL BE CALLED UPON IN THE
FUTURE.

AS I LISTEN TO TODAY'S NEWS AND
HEAR MORE AND MORE ABOUT
ATROCIOUS CRIMES AGAINST
HUMANITY IN RWANDA, YUGOSLAVIA
AND CAMBODIA, I REALIZE HOW VERY
FORTUNATE WE ARE TO LIVE IN THE
LAND OF THE FREE – AND HOW VERY
FORTUNATE WE ARE TO HAVE BRAVE
MEN AND WOMEN WHO GIVE THEIR
LIVES TO ENSURE OUR LIBERTY AND
FREEDOM.

TODAY WE HONOR THEIR
SELFLESSNESS AND COURAGE. TODAY
WE HONOR THEIR DEDICATION. AND, ON
THIS DAY, WE MEMORIALIZE THEIR
MEMORY WITH THE REST OF THE
NATION.

3

THE TRADITION OF MEMORIAL DAY
IN THE UNITED STATES BEGAN RIGHT
HERE IN PENNSYLVANIA MORE THAN 130
YEARS AGO. THREE WOMEN MET IN A
CEMETARY IN BOALSBURG, NEAR STATE
COLLEGE, AND DECORATED THE
GRAVES OF THOSE WHO HAD DIED IN
THE CIVIL WAR AND THE WAR OF 1812
WITH FLOWERS AND FLAGS.

I THINK I UNDERSTAND A LITTLE OF
WHAT ABRAHAM LINCOLN FELT WHEN
HE VISITED A SMALL PENNSYLVANIA
TOWN TO MARK THE FIRST
OBSERVANCE OF THE BATTLE OF
GETTYSBURG.

LINCOLN WAS ASKED TO HELP
DEDICATE THE CEMETERY FOR THE

THOUSANDS OF MEN AND WOMEN WHO
FOUGHT AND DIED IN THE BATTLE.

HIS PROBLEM, AS HE RECOUNTED
AT THE DEDICATION, WAS THAT HE FELT
INADEQUATE. HE WAS OVERWHELMED.
HE SAID NOTHING HE COULD SAY
WOULD SUFFICIENTLY DEDICATE THE
CEMETERY AND MONUMENTS.

THE ACTIONS AND SACRIFICE OF
THE MEN WHO FOUGHT THERE SPOKE
FOR THEMSELVES. AND THOSE ACTIONS
AND SACRIFICES HAD ALREADY
DEDICATED THE BATTLEFIELD, AS HE
SAID, "FAR ABOVE OUR POOR POWER
TO ADD OR DETRACT."

THAT'S THE HISTORY. BUT IT STILL
HOLDS TRUE TODAY.

THE ACTIONS AND SACRIFICE OF
THE MEN AND WOMEN WE HONOR
TODAY ALSO SPEAK FOR THEMSELVES.
THEY SPEAK OF A TIME WHEN SERVICE
TO COUNTRY WAS SECOND NATURE.
THEY SPEAK OF A NATION BUILT ON THE
BLOOD AND HONOR OF PEOPLE WHO
BELIEVED THAT FREEDOM AND LIBERTY
WERE WORTH THE ULTIMATE COST –
LIFE ITSELF.

WE ARE HERE TO HONOR THOSE
WHO MADE THAT COURAGEOUS
SACRIFICE.

THE PEOPLE WE REMEMBER TODAY
WERE WILLING TO LEAVE THEIR HOMES
AND FAMILIES, TRAVEL TO DISTANT
COUNTRIES, FIGHT FOR A WORTHY
CAUSE.

6

THEY WERE BRAVE MEN AND
WOMEN, NO DOUBT. BUT IT ISN'T THEIR
BRAVERY THAT SETS THEM APART.

BRAVERY DISTINGUISHES PEOPLE
IN BATTLE. WHAT SETS THESE
PATRIOTS APART FROM FAR TOO MANY
PEOPLE OF THIS GENERATION IS THE
WILLINGNESS TO DO BATTLE – THE
WILLINGNESS TO DEFEND OUR RIGHTS.

WE HAVE A UNIQUE AND VERY
SPECIAL WAY OF LIFE HERE IN THE
UNITED STATES – A WAY OF LIFE THAT
MANY NATIONS ATTEMPT TO EMULATE –
A WAY OF LIFE THAT MANY OF US TAKE
FOR GRANTED. WE HAVE THE
FREEDOM TO DO WHAT WE WANT TO DO
– LIVE WHERE WE WANT TO LIVE – SAY
WHAT WE WANT TO SAY.

WE CAN EVEN LEAVE OUR
COUNTRY – IF YOU WOULD WANT TO –
WITHOUT BEGGING FOR THE
PERMISSION OF OUR GOVERNMENT

TODAY, MANY AMERICANS TEND TO
THINK THAT FREEDOM IS SOMETHING
WE DESERVE – THAT IT IS OUR
RIGHTFUL DUE. PEOPLE FORGET THAT
NO ONE GAVE US OUR FREEDOM – OUR
ANCESTORS FOUGHT FOR IT.

JOHN F. KENNEDY ~~JR.~~, IN HIS 1961
INAUGURAL ADDRESS, SAID, "LET EVERY
NATION KNOW, THAT WE SHALL PAY
ANY PRICE, BEAR ANY BURDEN, MEET
ANY HARDSHIP, SUPPORT ANY FRIEND,
OPPOSE ANY FOE TO ASSURE THE
SURVIVAL AND THE SUCCESS OF
LIBERTY."

WHAT WE DO TODAY SERVES A
PURPOSE BEYOND SIMPLY HONORING
THOSE WHO DIED IN SERVICE FOR
THEIR COUNTRY. BUT REMEMBERING
THEIR DEATHS IS NOT ENOUGH – WE
MUST ALSO REMEMBER WHY THEY
DIED.

THEY FOUGHT HOME AND ABROAD,
IN STRANGE AND DISTANT COUNTRIES,
PROTECTING THOSE THEY LEFT BEHIND
AND THE FUTURE GENERATIONS STILL
TO COME.

ALTHOUGH WE CAN NEVER
PROPERLY THANK THEM FOR THEIR
SACRIFICE, OBSERVING MEMORIAL DAY
IS ONE WAY TO ENSURE THAT WE
NEVER FORGET THE GIFT THEY STILL
GIVE TO US.

THIS IS WHEN WE HONOR ALL
UNITED STATES VETERANS – MEN AND
WOMEN – WHO HAVE GIVEN THEIR
LIVES IN SERVICE TO THEIR COUNTRY
TO PROTECT AND DEFEND OUR NATION
AND ALL IT STANDS FOR – SO WE CAN
ENJOY SOME OF THE GREATEST
FREEDOMS IN ALL THE WORLD.

MANY OF YOU HERE TODAY ARE
VETERANS, AND I BET VIRTUALLY EVERY
AMERICAN HAS A PARENT,
GRANDPARENT, SIBLING, FRIEND OR
NEIGHBOR WHO HAS SERVED OR IS
NOW SERVING IN OUR ARMED FORCES.

WHEN YOU REALIZE HOW MANY
VETERANS LIVE IN YOUR COMMUNITY,
YOU MUST REALIZE THAT EACH OF

THEM FACED THE ULTIMATE SACRIFICE
– THE POTENTIAL OF GIVING THEIR
LIVES FOR THEIR COUNTRY.

WHEN YOU THINK ABOUT EACH
VETERAN YOU KNOW, YOU CAN BETTER
REALIZE HOW IMPORTANT EACH
PERSON WHO DIED WAS TO FAMILY AND
FRIEND, AND WHY WE SHOULD ALWAYS
REMEMBER THEIR SACRIFICE.

THIS IS THEIR DAY. AND FOR AS
MUCH AS THEY HAVE DONE FOR US, IT
IS ONLY RIGHT THAT WE HOLD THIS
OBSERVANCE FOR THEM.

THIS IS A DAY WHEN ALL OF US
PAUSE FOR A FEW MOMENTS TO THINK
ABOUT WHERE WE ARE AND WHERE WE
ARE GOING.

TODAY IS A DAY OF REMEMBRANCE
FOR LONG-LOST DREAMS THAT WERE
BOTH ACHIEVED AND SHATTERED ON
MANY BATTLEFIELDS.

FOR THOSE WHO PERISHED ON
OUR BEHALF, WE SHARE THEIR
OPTIMISM OF A BRIGHTER FUTURE. WE
RECOGNIZE THEIR ACCOMPLISHMENTS
IN MAKING TODAY'S FREEDOM A
REALITY.

MANY PEOPLE HAVE PAID THE
PRICE SO THAT GATHERINGS LIKE THIS
~~ONE~~ CAN TAKE PLACE. WHILE WE
SHOULD REMEMBER THOSE WHO MADE
THE ULTIMATE SACRIFICE, WE SHOULD
NOT FORGET THOSE WHO CONTINUE TO
SERVE IN THEIR PLACES.

FOR THOSE HERE WHO WERE OR
STILL ARE PARTICIPANTS IN THE LINE
OF DUTY – I SALUTE YOU.

FOR THE FAMILIES THAT ENDURED
AND SURVIVED DESPITE TRAGEDY,
FEAR AND DEATH – I SALUTE YOU.

EVEN ON A DAY AS SOLEMN AS
MEMORIAL DAY, IT IS EASY TO LOOK ON
THE BRIGHTER SIDE. AND TODAY, ALL
WE HAVE TO DO IS LOOK AROUND US.

THANK YOU AGAIN FOR INVITING
ME HERE TO SPEAK WITH YOU.

13