

MEMORIAL DAY

All mountains are similar, but few bear a vein of gold and the same is true of man. Men look much the same, but not all possess the blood of a warrior and even fewer the strength of character to wager it.

In order to protect our way of life and allow us to pursue our dreams, American warriors tiptoe along the precipice of Hell and lean over the slippery edge to spit into the Devil's eye day after day.

They face hardship and adversity that mock the margins of possibility. They knock on Death's door again and again as they pray he is not home. Any questions about their courage, character, and loyalty have been fully answered. They engage in the unthinkable, see the indescribable, and endure the unendurable and all of it is done for us. They offer no complaints, disclose no regrets, and refuse any retreat.

On occasion, colorful ribbons and shiny medals are "awarded" to these warriors to recognize physical wounds, or some handbook's definition of bravery. Although appreciated, these adornments and commendations mean very little to a true warrior. They are the Mardi Gras beads of war and hold little value.

Apart from the love of his family and his God, what he wants more than anything cannot be held in one's hand, or worn on a uniform, and it will not be inscribed on his gravestone. More important than his own life is the love, loyalty and respect of his fellow warriors and that is never bestowed or awarded, it must be earned and the price is sometimes high. After he earns this perfect trinity, he is assured he will die a rich man whether his final resting place is a golden coffin in God's acre or wrapped in rags and laid to rest in a potter's field.

Despite all the wealth our great country possesses, victory in war cannot be purchased. It requires the ultimate investment. War's only legal tender is a warrior's blood. Warriors satisfy the cost of war by greasing Death's palm and the road to peace is paved using cobblestones glazed with their blood. History is altered each time blood is spilled in battle. Epic battles consist of a series of distinct and decisive encounters. It becomes personal and each casualty of war is a story unto itself.

For the survivors, each of these encounters is laundered through his soul, mitigated by his conscience, reconciled in his heart, and burned into his memory to be summoned time after time in his dreams. For the fallen, this task is left to his family and it is an enormous price to pay and an onerous burden to bear.

Loyd Cates

God bless these families and those who gave all. They are truly America's finest and let no one tell you differently. It only takes a brief personal moment for all of us to make each day Memorial Day. It seems the very least we can do.

With Love, Loyalty, and Respect,
SSG Cates
199th Light Infantry Brigade