

# Chapter 7

## Memorial Day

### Life experiences give new meaning to Memorial Day

**Released: 25 May 2000**

**by Tech. Sgt. Selena P. Zuhoski**

**Air Force Legal Services Agency**

**BOLLING AIR FORCE BASE, D.C. (AFPN)**

The meaning of Memorial Day has changed for me as my experiences in life have changed me.

This is what I believe Memorial Day means -- recognizing the sacrifices others have made for our country. It is a day to thank them; respect them; appreciate them; celebrate them; be grateful for them; but above all else -- remember them.

I was raised in Tampa, Fla. One Memorial Day, when I was 8 years old, my dad took me fishing. We stopped at the store for ice. There, sitting outside the store was an old gentleman wearing a military flight cap and a red vest covered with patches and pins. My dad bought a little plastic red, white, and blue flower from the man.

It was the way my dad said "thank you" for that little flower that left an indelible impression in my mind. It was as though that man had just sold my dad the most valuable thing on Earth. He was so serious, so respectful. I remember thinking "but it was only a little plastic flower." Later, my dad explained. He told me that he had thanked the man for being a war veteran and the flower was a reminder, on this day at least, to thank and respect all who have served in wars for America. It was a quiet and peaceful day on the water fishing with my dad. That was the first Memorial Day I was aware that the day was reserved for a specific purpose ... to give solemn thanks and respect to those who fought for our country.

At 17, I spent Memorial Day with my friends in Key West, Fla. We sailed all morning; dove for conch and lobster along the coral heads all day; and then built a bonfire on the beach of a little island and roasted our catch. At that time, current events in the world were full of promise for the future.

Hostages had been freed; Germany unified; and Americans were involved in civil rights movements all over the world. The purpose of the day became less solemn and more celebratory. I gave thanks, but I also celebrated that I lived in the greatest nation on Earth.

At 34, I was deployed to Dhahran, Saudi Arabia. I was assigned as the law office

manager of the 4404th Wing (Provisional), Office of the Staff Judge Advocate, located in Khobar Towers. I spent that Memorial Day at "The Oasis," which consisted of a huge "L" shaped swimming pool, barbecue pit and driving range.

It was 118 degrees that day and the pool was packed. Songs with lyrics about freedom and America blared over the loud speakers. By that time I had learned a little bit about the culture of the country I was living in. I had been stationed at Zaragoza Air Base, Spain, and Incirlik AB, Turkey, and had seen how those cultures were very different from ours. The differences in Saudi Arabia far exceeded anything I had experienced before. That Memorial Day I felt deep gratitude for being born an American and for the opportunity to contribute, however minutely, to preserving my country's way of life.

On June 25, 1996, I played volleyball with my squadron and then went to the rec. center. Around 10:00 p.m. the lights in the building flickered, there was a deep boom, and then glass and concrete were blown in on us. Furniture, along with people, was thrown across the room. When I got out of the building I saw a huge gray-orange mushroom-shaped cloud in the sky. I smelled sulfur in the air. I ran over to one of the two buildings closest to the blast. The door was blocked with debris. I could hear people screaming inside. I helped to clear an opening so people could get out. We then started searching inside for those who might be trapped.

When we got to the fourth floor we found a young man lying in blood. He was wearing only shorts. He had a deep gash on the left side of his lower chest, someone covered with the palm of their hand. The room next to us was on fire. We found a door blown off its hinges and used it as a gurney and carried the injured man down the four flights of stairs. When we got outside we laid him on top of a wooden picnic table. I stayed with him, and took over applying pressure to his injury. I covered it as tight as I could to keep the blood inside with my right hand. I held his left hand with my left hand. He was in shock. I told him to hang on. He said "Oh God ...Oh, God." He was so brave. He died within a few minutes just as medical personnel started arriving. I watched them carry his body away and put it on a blue military bus.

When I turned back another bleeding man had been placed on the picnic table. He had a deep cut along the right side of his face and eye. He also had two deep cuts above his waist. Medical personnel were handing out first-aid kits and we were able to bandage his wounds fairly quickly. He was placed on a different bus.

The chief of Security Police told us to pass the word that everyone should gather at the Desert Rose, which was our dining facility, and try to find our unit. At the Desert Rose, there were hundreds of injured men and women.

The dining facility was transformed into a make shift hospital. Those of us who were not injured worked through the night sweeping glass, clearing debris, and making sleeping areas for those whose quarters were destroyed.

The next morning I learned that 19 American airmen were killed. More than 400 others

were injured. I later learned that five of the airmen who died were from my home base -- Patrick Air Force Base, Fla.

This year will be the fourth Memorial Day since the bombing of Khobar Towers. Not a day has passed that I haven't thought about that one young man and the other 18 men who died that night. And that is how it should be. They paid the ultimate sacrifice for their country ... for our country.

