

Memorial Day at the Museum of the Forgotten Warriors

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A reminder of a war now past, the haunting hulk of the "Huey" helicopter stands as a silent sentinel at the entrance to the Museum of the Forgotten Warriors. To those valiant troops it served and protected, and those that witnessed war on television for the first time, it is a symbol and reminder of the struggles and terror of another conflict where courage and pain were common place and death was a constant companion.

Soldiers from its past war, Viet Nam, many with heads bowed and minds racing in quiet remembrance, touch this engineering marvel with reverence. Emotions, long since forgotten, return and often bring tears as they recall how this machine carried some to death, yet returned so many to life. It was their safety net, it was their womb.

Additional representations of war's equipment are also showcased at the museum. A Korean War vintage OH 23 "Raven" helicopter, similar to those popularized by the TV sitcom, MASH, waits patiently for those that would restore its beauty while fewer visit who remember its mission. The numbers of servicemen and women from that era who would tell its story declines daily.

Captured Japanese 75 MM Cannon from World War II, their supporting structures riddled by shrapnel, give stark testimony to the history of that war and the resolve of the American people and the supremacy of her fighters. A treaded tank retriever nearby has a story to tell, but even fewer veterans visit and, all too soon, this generation of warriors who would recall its service will slip into the past. On Memorial Day, at cemeteries across the land, flags mark their tombs.

There are no veterans left from World War I and those who visit can only reflect on the displays from that period and the sacrifices that were endured as this nation sent her best and brightest to engage in conflict on another continent. Frank Buckles, a corporal in that war and the last link to the 2 million men that fought "in a war to end all wars," passed away February 27th, 2011, at 110 years.

And so it goes at the Museum of the Forgotten Warriors. Hardware and memorabilia from America's latest wars, Iraq and Afghanistan, have arrived at the museum. Standing alongside the 50,000 pieces of history already there, they honor the bravery and courage of a new generation of men and women warriors who, by their service, stand equal to those of previous generations.

The museum is a special place. It does not glorify and is not a monument to war; rather, it is a physical testament to the courage and sacrifice of the men and women who have served America since revolutionary times. The fallen are honored and the surviving veterans who visit have the opportunity to recall their own military service and tell their own stories. This is particularly true each Memorial Day.

Memorial Day is a United States Federal Holiday. Formally known as Decoration Day, which commemorated the service men and women who died in military service, Memorial Day has become a time to gather with friends and family and visit the graves of the deceased whether they had been in service to their country, or not.

As we approach this Memorial Day, Monday, May 30th, even as we gather to be with friends and family, let us remember and honor those that have given so much. As we pay tribute to those warriors who are still with us, we pay homage to those that have passed before. We have been given victory and freedom by their courage and humbled by their sacrifice. We must always seize the opportunity to thank them.



The Museum

of the Forgotten Warriors is located off of North Beale Road, 1/2 mile west of Beale Air Force Base at 5865 "A" Road, Marysville, CA 96901.

Museum hours are Saturdays 10:00 am to 3:00 pm and Thursdays 7:00 pm to 9:00 pm. Admission is free. The Museum will be open this Memorial Day from 10:00 am to 3:00 pm.

For more information, call 530-742-3090 or visit www.museumoftheforgottenwarriors.org.

Dan Spears is the museum founder, director and curator.