

CREATION OF MEMORIAL DAY

Early in May 1868, Adjutant-General Norton Chipman received a letter from some comrade then living, as he remembers, in Cincinnati, in which the writer referred to the fact that he had served as a private soldier in the Union Army; that in his native country, Germany, it was the custom of the people to assemble in the spring-time and scatter flowers upon the graves of the dead. He suggested that the Grand Army of the Republic inaugurate such an observance in memory of the Union dead. General Chipman thought the suggestion most opportune, and at once made a rough draft of a General Order covering this subject, and laid it, with the letter referred to, before General Logan. General Logan warmly approved the Order, himself adding several paragraphs. The date selected, May 30, was with the idea of using one of the spring months because of their poetical associations, and also to make it late in the last spring month, that it might be possible to find flowers in the New England and extreme Northern States.

The Order reads as follows:

HEADQUARTERS GRAND ARMY OF THE REPUBLIC,
WASHINGTON, D. C.,
May 5, 1868.

General Orders, No. 11.

I. The 30th day of May, 1868, is designated for the purpose of strewing with flowers or otherwise decorating the graves of comrades who died in defense of their country during the late rebellion, and whose bodies now lie in almost every city, village, and hamlet churchyard in the land. In this observance no form or ceremony is prescribed, but posts and comrades will in their own way arrange such fitting services and testimonials of respect as circumstances may permit.

We are organized, comrades, as our regulations tell us, for the purpose, among other things, "of preserving and strengthening those kind and fraternal feelings which have bound together the soldiers, sailors, and marines who united to suppress the late rebellion." What can aid more to assure this result than by cherishing tenderly the memory of our heroic dead, who made their breasts a barricade between our country and its foe? Their soldier lives were the reveille of freedom to a race in chains, and their death a tattoo of rebellious tyranny in arms. We should guard their graves with sacred vigilance. All that the consecrated wealth and taste of the Nation can add to their adornment and security is but a fitting tribute to the memory of her slain defenders. Let no wanton foot tread rudely on such hallowed grounds. Let pleasant paths invite the coming and going of reverent visitors and fond mourners. Let no vandalism of avarice or neglect, no ravages of time, testify to the present or to the coming generations that we have forgotten, as a people, the cost of free and undivided republic.

If other eyes grow dull and other hands slack, and other hearts cold in the solemn trust, ours shall keep it well as long as the light and warmth of life remain in us.

Let us, then, at the time appointed, gather around their sacred remains and garland the passionless mounds above them with choicest flowers of springtime; let us raise above them the dear old flag they saved from dishonor; let us in this solemn presence renew our pledges to aid and assist those whom they have left among us as sacred charges upon the Nation's gratitude,--the soldier's and sailor's widow and orphan.

II. It is the purpose of the Commander-in-Chief to inaugurate this observance with the hope it will be kept up from year to year, while a survivor of the war remains to honor the memory of his departed comrades. He earnestly desires the public press to call attention to this Order, and lend its friendly aid in bringing it to the notice of comrades in all parts of the country in time for simultaneous compliance therewith.

III. Department commanders will use every effort to make this order effective.

By command of:
JOHN A. LOGAN,
Commander-in-Chief.

Source: National Organization, Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War