

of comrades who died in defense of their country during the late rebellion." The GAR hoped the practice would be repeated annually.

In 1873, New York was the first state to legalize May 30th as a holiday. By 1890, all northern states had followed suit. Until the National Holiday Act of 1971, Memorial Day was observed each May 30. Today it is officially recognized on the last Monday of May.

Ponder the Sacrifices

But to many veterans, changing the day merely to create three-day weekends has undermined the meaning of this sacred day. As Memorial Day has grown to honor the sacrifices of all veterans killed in defense of the nation's freedom, all citizens should regard it as their civic obligation to remember why it is a holiday. While non-veterans may not take the time to decorate fallen soldiers graves or attend ceremonies, they should at least take a few moments to ponder how different their lives would be. Without the courage of the many patriots who have died so that the rest of us can live free, American democracy could be a footnote in history.

Perhaps the most profound tribute of all was made on the first national memorial observance in May 1868 by a man who would become the country's 20th President, Union Army Gen. James A. Garfield: "They summed up and perfected, by one supreme act, the highest virtues of men and citizens. For love of country they accepted death, and thus resolved all doubts, and made immortal their patriotism and virtue."

LOYALTY DAY

Truly a VFW-inspired holiday, Loyalty Day was created by the organization in 1921. In 1955, VFW Post 3 member and U.S. Rep. Jimmy Van Zandt of Pennsylvania, introduced a bill proclaiming May 1 as Loyalty Day—a time to proclaim patriotism and love of country. To celebrate this special day, plan a worthy program. Following is a list of ideas for your program:

- 1) Hold a public ceremony such as the rededication of a local memorial or stage a community program at a park or auditorium. Remember our men and women currently serving on active duty and in the National Guard and Reserve. Order a Loyalty Day Poster (item #4413) from the VFW Store online here www.vfwstore.org or call (800) 821-2606.
- 2) Conduct a Loyalty Day poster design contest in local schools.
- 3) Invite recently-naturalized citizens to participate in your Loyalty Day program.
- 4) Request a Loyalty Day proclamation from the mayor or selectmen.
- 5) Participate in the opening ceremony of the **March of Dimes March for Babies**. You can

also call 1-888-274-3711 to find out the location of the nearest March of Dimes chapter.

- 6) VFW Day Celebration Event — Sept. 29
Show your support by honoring all veterans and VFW members in your community. Celebrate the high moral purpose and idealism that motivated the establishment of the VFW. Here are some suggested ideas to plan your event:
 - ✓ Find an appropriate event site.
 - ✓ Host an open house at your Post.
 - ✓ Have a recognition dinner or lunch.
 - ✓ Invite the local community to participate.

Planning Your Loyalty Day Program

The earlier you start working on your program, the better. Here's a brief timeline to help you avoid unforeseen problems.

January

- Locate a site for your community program.
- Create a file with all necessary planning folders.
- Schedule speakers for your program. Don't forget your **Voice of Democracy**, **Patriot's Pen** and the **Smart/Maher Natl** **Citizenship Ed Teacher Award** winners as possible speakers.

February

- Meet with merchants, civic leaders and clergy to invite their participation in your program.

March

- Request a signed proclamation from your mayor or city council.
- Contact local elementary schools and propose a Loyalty Day poster contest for students. At the same time, coordinate a date to collect entries.
- Through the **VFW Store**, order posters and citations for all poster contest participants.

April

- Send out invitations to VIPs, such as local city government officials and prominent veterans or citizens.
- Place VFW Loyalty Day posters in prominent community locations.
- At least one week in advance of your ceremony, send out news releases to media.

VETERANS DAY

Often many well-meaning veterans will say, "This is our day. Why should we have an event honoring ourselves?" While it's true that this is the day set aside for communities and other organizations to honor those who have served, it is also a time for us to honor those with whom we have served. For that reason alone, it is important for the VFW, at all levels, to attend and participate in city-led events. If your community chooses to ignore its veterans, then it is incumbent on your Post to take the lead. Take advantage of the opportunity to show others why you served. Take advantage of the