

Beacon Hill Byline by Mary Rogeness

May 31, 2005

Memorial Day, 2005

It's Memorial Day again, the sober holiday that calls us to remember the men and women who have given their lives in defense of the United States. This year's cool, rainy weather leading up to May 30 seems to remind us of the meaning of that day with its unseasonable insistence. In fair weather or foul, the veterans of the nation's past conflicts continue to mark the day.

This year I participated in two towns' services of remembrance, and I commend both Longmeadow and East Longmeadow for maintaining the traditions of the day. The services have been repeated each year throughout the years when our nation was at peace, and they are even more visible in today's worrisome world. This year the town of East Longmeadow added a new event to the schedule that I will discuss later.

Longmeadow held its service on the Green during Longmeddowe Days, drawing on the weekend's Civil War re-enactors to give a historical perspective to the event. The soldiers from that long ago war reminded all of us of the conflict that killed more Longmeadow men than any conflict before or since. We look back to that distant time with nostalgia, but the 19th century small town of Longmeadow sent 27 men to their deaths in that conflict.

Carrying the thread of history into the recent past were the participating town veterans: Corporal Peter Santos, Captain Gerald Nolet, Captains Carey Miller and William Morey. Navy veteran Lloyd Waite and Army veteran Howard Vincent laid wreaths at the town's memorials.

Longmeadow High School senior Brent DeSellier gave the traditional student speech on the meaning of Memorial Day. In addition to presenting a meaningful talk about the day, he is living the meaning of patriotism. Brent plans to enlist in ROTC next year in college.

East Longmeadow marked Memorial Day with two separate events.

The addition to the town's services came as a community breakfast for all veterans, held at the Senior Center. Individuals who are known around town through their civilian lives and careers were suddenly once again the soldiers, sailors and airmen of World War II and Korea. As they recited their service in such places as the South Pacific, Iwo Jima, North Africa and Omaha Beach, those war zones from history books became again the reality of Americans fighting for our nation.

Next came Monday's traditional May 30th Memorial Day service. Participants came from all age groups in the town. The American Legion and Italian American Veterans sponsored the event. Middle school students gave recitations; high-schoolers played in the band; elected officials spoke. Iraq veteran Dr. David Kosiorek spoke and presented an American flag that had been carried on a fighter jet to the town.

As always, I came away from the sober ceremonies grateful for our free country, thankful for the individuals who have given so much to protect that freedom, and indebted to the individuals who continue the traditions of Memorial Day.