

Beacon Hill Byline by Mary Rogeness

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Remembering those who died for our country

Longmeadow and East Longmeadow both commemorate Memorial Day with community gatherings. This week's byline is a summary of my remarks at those ceremonies.

Memorial Day began shortly after the Civil War when Longmeadow, which included East Longmeadow, was a very small town. The town had lost 27 men to the war, a staggering loss from a population fewer than 1,000. It was first commemorated locally in 1870.

I found a contemporaneous report on the War recently in a Civil War diary written by a remarkable man. He was a North Carolina native who became a sailor in the U.S. Navy in 1862 after running away from his Southern owners. This is what he wrote after learning that the war had ended.

“In the harbor of Cadiz – on my return on board I heard the Glad Tidings that the Stars and Stripes had been planted over the Capital of the D—nd Confederacy by the invincible Grant. While we honor the living soldiers who have done so much we must not forget to whisper for fear of disturbing the Glorious sleep of the many who have fallen. Martyrs to the cause of Right and Equality.”

The absolute patriotism in his words is still touching today, 140 years after they were written. Reading his diary gave me a window to that bloody American conflict. Reading about another war in Ernie Pyle's World War II dispatches has given me a window to the fighters in that war. Thanks to Dr. Kosiorek for his words in Longmeadow that gave another first-hand report on the very different war our nation is waging today.

Even though we live in today's world of instant communication, it seems hard to stay connected to the young men and women who are fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan. There is no Ernie Pyle and there is not even a warfront. Reports of progress are often lost among stories of IEDs and the tragedy of a running total of American casualties.

One status report on Iraq came recently from retired General Barry McCaffrey. General McCaffrey did not support the Iraq invasion; he is a very public critic of Secretary Rumsfeld. That background makes the report more valid than if he had been a supporter.

Stating that the military performance of Iraqi forces ranges from excellent to fair, he was decidedly impressed by the Americans. He found “simply awe-inspiring” the “morale, fighting effectiveness and confidence of the U.S. combat forces.”

He wrapped up his remarks with this cautionary statement: “Armies do not fight wars, countries fight wars.”

Let's support our troops and their success in fighting for our country to stabilize Iraq and Afghanistan so we can bring them home again.