

*Remarks for the  
Memorial Day Service  
May 27, 2002*

Thank you, General Lipscomb. General Berry, Pastor Turner, thank you for being with us today. And to everyone here today – especially those who have served our country in the armed forces – welcome to this simple ceremony where we remember with thanks the men and women who have given their all for this great country of ours.

Since the birth of America, we have stood for the enduring principles of freedom and the rights of man. Those are the principles that so many have died to protect. It is those principles – and the courage of those who have defended them – that we honor today.

There is something special about our nation – something special found in its people, in its form of government, in the land itself. There is something even more special about those we remember on this Memorial Day, because they are the ones who have worn the uniforms of our military. They are the ones who fought on foreign soil to defend their native soil.

We have been celebrating Memorial Day since its official proclamation in 1868, some 134 years ago. In recent years, however, this day has become associated with little more than a long weekend, an extra day away from the office, a quick trip to the beach.

It's time for us to remember again why we celebrate this day.

We do it because we cannot allow the memory of those who have fought in wars to be forgotten. From the initial battles for freedom during the Revolution to the current conflict in Afghanistan, the men and women of America who fought and died must be remembered by all generations.

And this year, in particular, we are called to remember thousands of innocents who perished in the greatest attack on our nation since Pearl Harbor.

On that clear September morning last year, we were violently shaken from our comfort and cast into a new and frightening state of mind.

The deaths of so many people in those planes and buildings, combined with both the threats and actual incidents of biological terrorism that followed, have called us to a new appreciation for the spirit of our nation. It is a spirit of thanksgiving, courage, and love for this land we call America – a land we call home.

It is that spirit which has been a constant companion to those who serve in our armed forces, and I know it is strong in the men and women of the Mississippi National Guard. On this Memorial Day, I want to publicly recognize these citizen soldiers and their commitment to their mission.

Long before September 11, the Mississippi National Guard had a reputation for being the best. They have always been called on to serve when their state or their country needed them.

In the days and months following September 11, they have taken their mission to a new level.

With the members of the Task Force Rifles under deployment to a peace-keeping mission in Bosnia, other units of the Guard were called to service.

They provided security at airports around the state and the Grand Gulf Nuclear facility. They supported – and continue to support – air and security missions around the country and the world.

I have visited these soldiers as they trained at Camp Shelby and Fort Benning. I visited with them as they kept the peace in Bosnia, away from their families during Thanksgiving and Christmas. I have seen first-hand the work they do.

The soldiers of the Mississippi National Guard are only as good as their leaders – and that's why our soldiers are the best. General Lipscomb, General Berry, I want to thank you for the tremendous leadership you offer to the Guard. A true leader leads by example, whether he want to or not. Thank you for the example you set for our soldiers.

Memorial Day. A day for us to remember, to give thanks, to appreciate the complex feelings felt by soldiers as they give their all to defend their land and their liberty.

In a Memorial Day speech 118 years ago, Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes spoke of those feelings.



“To fight a war,” he said, “you must believe something and want something with all your might... More than that, you must be willing to commit yourself to a course, without being able to foresee exactly where you will come out... The rest belongs to fate. One may fall – at the beginning of the charge or at the top of the earthworks; but in no other way can he reach the rewards of victory.”

So many have reached the rewards of victory through the years. America stands as evidence of that fact, and America will continue to stand because of those who serve.

And so, to the veterans here today, to the soldiers of the Mississippi National Guard, and to the countless who have fallen to keep us free... we remember.

May God bless our nation – indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.