This month’s Listserv looks at the origins of Memorial Day (May 29 this year) the 100th anniversary of American entry into World War I, a Pulitzer Prize for an article about a veteran returning home and a new book by a prominent veteran.

**Origins of Memorial Day**

Memorial Day honors the fallen in battle while Veterans Day honors all veterans. Its origins date from the Civil War with some 25 sites in the U.S., claiming to be a progenitor and it is also to similar ceremonies in ancient Greece and Rome. Called “Decoration Day” for many years, it was not officially designated a federal holiday until 1971.

Here are some of the birth stories:

On April 25, 1866, a group of women in Columbus MS honored both Union and Confederate graves with flowers. They had meant only to honor the Confederates but were disturbed by the sight of bare Union **graves**.

On May 1, 1865, former slaves held a ceremony in Charleston, SC to honor and remember Union soldiers, called the “Martyrs of the Race Course” because they had died at a race track that had been converted into a military prison **camp**.

On May 5, 1866 Gen. John B. Murray, responding to an idea by local druggist Henry Welles led a march in 3 local cemeteries in Waterloo, NY where graves of civil war veterans had been “decorated”. The entire village “was decorated with flags at half mast, draped with evergreens and mourning black. Veterans, civic societies and residents, led by General Murray, marched to the strains of martial music to the three village **cemeteries**.”

On May 5, 1868, Maj. Gen. John A. Logan in his capacity as leader of the Grand Army of the Republic, a Union army veterans group, declared that a “Decoration Day” should be observed on May 30. It is believed he chose this date because flowers are in bloom all over the country by the end of May and/or the date does not commemorate any individual Civil War battle. Logan, after whom Washington’s Logan Circle is named, had been a Civil War general, and during his career also a member of the House and Senate and unsuccessful candidate Republican candidate for Vice President. His proclamation initiated a large observance at Arlington National Cemetery on May 30 1868 to include speeches by Gen. U.S. Grant and others, children from the soldiers and Sailors Home and a procession through the cemetery by Grand Army of the Republic members strewing flowers on Union and Confederate graves, reciting prayers and **singing hymns**.
Observance of “Decoration Day” grew up in many places and then coalesced into the holiday of today. By 1890, every state has adopted it as an official holiday. The term Memorial Day” had also moved into the parlance over the century after the Civil War. The wearing of red poppies was later inspired by the World War I poem “In Flanders Fields” by John McRae.

This type of remembrance, in fact, goes back much further. The ancient Greeks and Romans had public ceremonies and feasts in which graves of the war dead were festooned with flowers. In Athens, fallen soldiers were buried at Kerameikos with prestigious ceremonies. Pericles made the first known public tribute in 431 BC honoring those who died in the Peloponnesian War. It works just as well today “Not only are they commemorated by columns and inscriptions, but there dwells also an unwritten memorial of them, graven not on stone but in the hearts of men.”

On March 7, 1966, New York’s governor Nelson Rockefeller recognized Waterloo NY as Memorial Day’s birthplace by official designation as did a Congressional resolution and a proclamation by President Lyndon B. Johnson on May 26 of that year.

In 1968 the Uniform Monday Holiday Act changed Memorial Day’s date from May 30 to the last Monday in May, to start of another controversy. For years until his death in 2012. Hawaii Senator Daniel Inouye a decorated and injured World War II veteran, introduced Bills to return the holiday to May 30 but failed. The purpose was to bring it back more to the fallen and away from barbeques and the Indy 500. This feeling was embodied in the National Moment of Remembrance Act of 2000 which urges American to pause at 3 PM local time on Memorial Day and establishes a White House Commission on the National Moment of Remembrance. This body has a charter to “encourage the people of the United States to give something back to their country, which provides them so much freedom and opportunity” via commemorations of Memorial Day and the National Moment of Remembrance.

America's Entry into World War I
We passed the 100th anniversary of American entry into World War I on April 6. An excellent three-part PBS documentary entitled “The American Experience: The Great War” was broadcast in early April and is available here. The series discusses the development of an effective fighting force, the battle of Belleau Wood and other military aspects. It is especially noteworthy for its discussion of the home front including the country’s initial reticence to enter the war and how it was drawn into it; conscription; the social and legal measures against antiwar activists or those with pro-German attitudes; the complexity of Woodrow Wilson about whom the series offers a balanced view; the final success of the suffragette movement just after the war; and, from the disappointed African-American veterans who fought and expected more at home, the early beginnings of the modern civil rights movement. Two prototype American heroes emerged from World War I: flying ace Eddie Rickenbacker who interestingly had a slight German accent, reflecting his home
language, and was the predecessor to Charles Lindbergh, John Glenn and others and Tennessean Alvin York who started as a conscientious objector but was convinced of the righteousness of the war. World War I was followed the birth of the American Legion, whose Preamble has remained the same since its founding in 1919 and the Disabled American Veterans established in 1921. And of course the emergence of America as a major international force.

**Pulitzer Prize**
One of this year’s Pulitzer Prizes was won by C.J Chivers of the NY Times for the absorbing story of the decline and recovery of Marine Corps Lance Corporal Sam Siatta’s after coming home. Sam suffered from PTSD, depression, alcohol abuse and memories of the deaths of civilians by his platoon (moral injury). He was imprisoned for home invasion after a fight he hardly remembered.

**Book**
A short book on leadership by Ret. Adm William H. McRaven “Make Your Bed: Little Things That Can Change Your Life...And Maybe the World” was a NY Times #1 Bestseller. Adm McCraven had been a Navy Seal and is credited with organizing and overseeing Operation Neptune Spear which resulted in the death of Osama Bin Laden. He held many Navy command positions and is now the Chancellor of the University of Texas System. The book, an extended graduation speech, is based on lessons from his Seal experience.

Joel Kupersmith, M.D.
Director, Georgetown University Veterans Initiatives
Professor of Medicine
Stats Section
The following are excerpts from a 2015 survey of veterans by the Disabled American Veterans
Although career transitions are most difficult for veterans, a majority of those surveyed still felt that military service enhanced career opportunities and 44% that it contributed to becoming financially secure.

Nearly 8 out of 10 veterans would serve again.

Do you feel your service in the military had an overall positive impact on your life?

95% who served 15 years or more strongly agree/agree that military service had an overall positive impact on his or her life.
Generally positive view of military service including a majority who would encourage sons, though much less so daughters, to follow their parents.

53% of respondents felt that the public treats veterans well.
Two-thirds of survey respondents celebrate Veterans Day in some way

Survey of 1701 veterans over age 18 years with at least 6 months of service by GfK utilizing Knowledge Panel®, a probability-based web panel designed to be representative of the U.S.