

Proposed Treasury Newsletter Article:

Memorial Day Remembrance: How it Affects Veterans and Their Families

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For many, Memorial Day is only about barbeques and parades, a time for festive celebration, and enjoying that elusive extra day off from work. In many communities, Memorial Day weekend signals the unofficial start of summer and the opening of the various boardwalks along the shore. This day, however, holds a very special meaning for a certain segment of the population and their families.

During the month of May, our nation pauses to honor those individuals who gave their lives in service of their country. However, for many, this day is a somber remembrance of those lost, which often conjures up feelings of anxiety and depression among veterans and family members, which are major components of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

Memorial Day was first celebrated nationally on May 30, 1868, and was recognized as a day to honor soldiers who died during the Civil War. Prior to its designation as Memorial Day in 1971, the holiday was referred to as Decoration Day, which focused on revering the memory of those lost during armed conflict.

While many Americans mark this day as a remembrance to the fallen along with backyard festivities, these celebrations can act as a negative trigger for service members and veterans, who lost comrades to both combat and non-combat related incidents, and later, to

suicide. The families of service members are also affected in a negative way due to a phenomenon called anniversary reactions, which can become very intense, and, at times, debilitating. Guilt also plays an important role in these negative reactions due to the loss of close friends either during or after military service.

Many veterans and family members experience symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which includes anxiety, depression, irritability, sleep problems, and disturbing memories of war-related events and reminders. Service members and veterans who are diagnosed with PTSD are especially sensitive anniversaries of specific traumatic military related events.

Recent numbers from the United States Department of Veterans Affairs, show that 16 to 17 veterans continue to die by suicide every day. It is essential to recognize the complex meaning of Memorial Day while we honor and remember those who have survived, as well as those who made the ultimate sacrifice for our nation.

We must remember that Memorial Day, and the events surrounding it, are to be cherished and honored. Take the time to visit a local cemetery and pay your respects to the fallen who served their country well. Reach out to those veterans who may be experiencing distress from their time in service and listen to their stories, thanking them for a job well done.

Members of the civilian community must be cognizant of the fact that wounds are not always visible, and for those who suffer from trauma suffered during their time in service, it is a daily struggle to cope with these issues throughout the year.