

Watermelon, Indy car racing, and outdoor grilling by the newly-opened swimming pool. To many, Memorial Day means an extra day off to spend relaxing with friends and family. The school year is ending, classroom learning is winding down, and antsy students are itching for sunshine. That was me, too, until I learned the true meaning of Memorial Day and what it means to my family. Memorial Day is about the respect: respecting those who have died for our freedom and those who continue sacrifice for it.

Once upon a World War II, my great-grandfather Jim Robbins was serving in Europe. Blind in one eye, Jim was unable to serve in combat; however, he was trained in instrument and watch repair. At the same time, his older brother, Thomas Robbins, was serving in the 82nd Airborne in Belgium as a sergeant with two good eyes. The war lingered on and became more challenging; time passed, and the two brothers hadn't seen each other in two years. Realizing the uncertainty of their future, Jim and Thomas decided to take a risk. While Jim awaited orders and Thomas recovered from wounds, they risked their positions and lives to go AWOL and meet at a pub in England. To them, the risk was worth it. They hugged, traded stories, and relished in the company of a familiar face in very unfamiliar territory (Louthain).

That would be the last time they saw each other. Two weeks later, Thomas was killed in battle. He is buried at Henri Chapelle American Cemetery in Belgium along with 7,992 of his fellow soldiers ("Henri-Chapelle").

After I heard this story, my grandfather, "Boppo" Robbins, was no longer simply the humble jewelry shop owner who wore a signature yellow cardigan and hosted the best Easter egg hunts each spring. He was a hero who put his family first.

Sergeant Thomas Robbins was also a hero who bravely defended his homeland and gave the ultimate sacrifice. He fought in the Battle of Normandy and assisted in the D-day invasions,

“one of the largest amphibious military assaults in history” (History.com Staff). The devastation my great-granduncle witnessed must have been unbearable. He demands the respect of all Americans. I am proud to say he is my relative.

Today, the land of the free still struggles to make peace in the world. Armed forces are deployed all over the globe not only fighting for our freedom, but also for the freedom of others. Men and women continue to counter the chaos that plagues our world. As of 2013, there were nearly 1.3 million American men and women serving in the armed forces (“Military”). I give them my utmost respect for their generosity and bravery. Without them, my country would not be the same.

This Memorial Day, I will spend the day with my family and friends; however, I will not focus on barbecue chicken, fruit salad, and swimming pool games. Instead, I look forward to saluting our American flag in tribute to all of the Jim and Thomas Robbins of our military, past and present. To me, that is the true meaning of Memorial Day.

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