

# GONE INTO THE SULLEN DARK



Suggested Remarks for the Use of  
DAV Speakers at Observances of

## MEMORIAL DAY 2006

(Acknowledgment of introduction, distinguished guests, officers and members of the DAV and Auxiliary, and others who are present.)

It's a difficult duty we face today, paying tribute to those killed in the cause of freedom.

They died – and we live.

They are forever lost to us – yet we enjoy a great gift from them.

Noting the enormous costs of the gift of freedom, should we walk an easy road as we offer our tributes today?

And there are easy roads. We could focus on the heroism of our war dead; and they are heroes, every one of them.

We could also talk about the lives they might have lived, if not for war.

Both of those choices allow us to idealize the dead ... and avoid talking about the grim realities of death in times of war.

But easy roads were never the way for the great American author, Ernest Hemingway. He looked life and war directly in the eye.

A combat-injured veteran of World War I, he wrote these lines in a poem about a soldier killed in battle:

Desire and  
All the sweet pulsing aches  
And gentle hurtings  
That were you,  
Are gone into the sullen dark.

Ernest Hemingway gives us no way out. His brief, eloquent phrases present what is real.

His young soldier is no hero of myth.

A real human being has been lost. A life that was strong and vibrant is “gone” – melted “into the sullen dark.”

We're forced to see that war is bloody, brutal, painful. Hemingway will not let us forget that. This is the cost – the true cost – of the freedom we celebrate today.

As one of millions who stood up to accept the risks of military service, let me state that freedom is worth the price. We must defend freedom, or we lose it.

And so we must understand that Memorial Day is not just a time of celebration. It's also a solemn moment of mourning.

This is why I thank you for coming here today. Unlike most, you gave thought to the meaning of this national holiday. You chose to mark its very serious intent.

One look at today's newspaper shows that you're running against the grain of popular culture.

Think of all of the people who are driving to the malls for the Memorial Day sales right now.

They're not thinking about the costs of the freedom they enjoy. They're taking freedom for granted.

But you are different. Like Hemingway, you're ready to look at the reality of war.

And you have come here to pay tribute to those who paid for your freedom with the breath of life itself. There's weight and value in the patriotism you express.

And there is more.

In some way and in some measure, you do your part to make life better for our veterans.

Among our veterans' groups, there's a saying that goes around at this time of year:

*The best way to honor the dead  
is to serve those who lived, but  
came home sick and wounded.*

This is a significant idea. Those who gave their lives for America are beyond our help, really. Other than honoring their memory, there's nothing we can give them.

But what would they want us to do?

You and I know the answer. They would have us reach out to their brothers and sisters in arms, especially those who feel the greatest need.

This is our fervent purpose in the Disabled American Veterans, which I represent. It's the same for every veterans' group here today ... the same for every Auxiliary. It's a top priority for all of us.

Listening to our politicians, you'd think they share this concern, *and many do*. But some do not.

We must ask: ***Why is this so?***

Today, I propose that the answer is simple. Some of our leaders do not want America to face the actual cost of war in terms of its long-term impact on human beings.

Once that cost is paid by real human beings, it becomes a financial cost borne principally by the federal government – and it's a permanent cost.

Every day, throughout a lifetime, a disabled veteran continues to pay the price of freedom. And America's financial obligation for benefits and medical care only dies when the veteran dies.

Some of our politicians resent the idea of paying that cost.

Oh, they'll send our young men and women off to war with a rally and a cheer. But, when they come home sick and bleeding, it's another story.

This is wrong. This is dreadfully, horribly wrong. You can wave the American Flag over it, covering it with all kinds of patriotic phrases, but it's still wrong.

The cost of dealing with the life-long impact of military service is part of the price of war.

It's particularly important to keep this fact in mind today, as Iraq and Afghanistan subject our troops to some of the most devastating injuries our veterans have ever survived:

- traumatic brain injuries,
- terrible burns,
- amputations,
- severe nerve damage and paralysis,
- scars that can never be repaired,
- blindness,
- deafness,

- shrapnel wounds caused by suicide bombers and home-made landmines.

The list goes on and on. And so does the price our youngest veterans will pay throughout most of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Long after Iraq and Afghanistan are written into the history books, the wheelchairs will still be rolling.

In the lives of these men and women, the wars will never end. Nor can our nation's commitment to their well being.

Simple justice demands more than lip service on Memorial Day.

That's why I ask you to remember that Memorial Day theme:

*The best way to honor the dead  
is to serve those who lived, but  
came home sick and wounded.*

Many of you give your hearts and souls to this work through the chapters, posts, and auxiliaries of your veterans' organizations. I thank you from the bottom of my heart.

Your volunteer efforts – in our hospitals and on many other fronts – make such a difference. Our veterans and their families owe you a tremendous debt of gratitude.

Truly, you have served.

And truly, you continue to serve.

Many of our fellow citizens join you in this work – even though they may not be veterans or members of veterans' families.

They give of their time. They make contributions. They show their support of our nation's veterans in so many ways, large and small. The American people love their veterans.

But that support doesn't automatically translate into pro-veteran policy from our government.

Some in our government will tell you about dramatic increases in spending on veterans. And that's fine until you look closely at the numbers.

That's when you learn that larger and larger numbers of veterans are waiting longer and longer for needed medical care ... even surgery.

That's when you find out that some never get the treatment they need.

Some politicians will tell you the VA is only cutting "wealthy veterans" out of the system. Well, the last group cut from the system had annual incomes between \$25,000 and \$35,000.

That is not wealth! That's the definition of a veteran trying to raise a family ... working two jobs just to keep things together ... and going to the VA because there's no health insurance.

And, when you look at the numbers closely, you find veterans waiting ages for decisions on claims for the benefits they earned – year after year in some cases.

People in government have made decisions that created the problems veterans face today. They have chosen to spend money on "other priorities."

But why not make a choice that favors veterans – meeting a sacred obligation to the men and women who defended our freedom?

It is, after all, only a choice.

And diverting at least some of that money into necessary health care for veterans would have been the effectively moral choice.

It would have served veterans. It would have honored our war dead by serving those who lived but came home sick and injured. It would have restored the spirit of Memorial Day.

My friends, it is not too late.

Thank you once again for coming today and showing your devotion for our nation's war dead by observing Memorial Day.

And thank you for your patriotism and your commitment to the men and women of our armed forces.

May God bless America.



**Note for Speakers:** A combat veteran, the author Ernest Hemingway served in World War I. He was awarded the Italian Cross of Valor for saving the lives of three Italian soldiers. Much of his writing harks back to his experience of war and the uneasy peace that settled on the souls of so many veterans after the carnage came to a close.

Following is the entire poem quoted in the remarks above. The speaker is presumably the wife or sweetheart of the dead soldier. However, the poem's title bears the date and place where Hemingway, himself, was wounded by a mortar explosion in 1918. This leaves one to wonder if the poem mourns two losses: first, the loss of a comrade in battle, and second, the loss of something in Hemingway himself on the day he was wounded.

### **Killed Paive – July 8 – 1918**

Desire and  
All the sweet pulsing aches  
And gentle hurtings  
That were you,  
Are gone into the sullen dark,  
Now in the night you come unsmiling  
To lie with me  
A dull, cold, rigid bayonet  
On my hot-swollen, throbbing soul.