

**REFLECTIONS FOR MEMORIAL DAY
REPRESENTATIVE GALE D. CANDARAS**

**Glendale Cemetery – Wilbraham
May 29, 2005**

The Civil War was one of the most cataclysmic events in American history. The war resulted in 620,000 casualties, the highest death toll by far of any conflict in which our nation has participated. Yet despite the devastation, the peace at Appomattox in April, 1865, confirmed the end of slavery in America and preserved the Union.

Historians have recorded that, a few years after the War, a group of Southern women visited a cemetery in Columbus, Mississippi, where they placed flowers on the graves of the dead Union and Confederate soldiers. Out of this simple act of patriotism, love, and respect grew Decoration Day, later renamed Memorial Day, to honor those who have fallen in battle so that “others might live,” as President Lincoln observed.

As we today honor the members of our armed forces who have so nobly given their lives so that we might enjoy the blessings of liberty, it is fitting that we look back in time to the days of the Civil War. While all of us remember the healing and ennobling words of Lincoln’s Gettysburg address, others have written of that conflict in words that have also echoed through the years. Allow me to share with you a letter from the Civil War. It is in the form of a poem written to the mother of a soldier who died in battle. With much affection for his fallen comrade in arms, the letter writer describes the circumstances of his friend’s death:

Dear Madam, I am a soldier, and my speech is rough and plain,
I’m not much used to writing, and I hate to give you pain;
But I promised I would do it, and he thought it might be so
If it came from one who loved him, perhaps it would ease the blow.
By this time you must surely guess, the truth I’ve feigned to hide,
And you’ll pardon me for rough soldier words, while I tell you how he died.

It was in the morrow’s battle so rained the shot and shell,
I was standing close beside him, and I saw him when he fell;
So I took him in my arms and laid him on the grass,
It was going against orders, but I think they let it pass.
‘Twas a mini-ball that struck him, it entered at his side,
But we didn’t think it fatal ‘til this morning when he died.

[And as he lay there dying, he spoke his final word,
And asked me please remember, and this is what I heard:
“Last night I wanted so to live, I seem so young to go,
Last week I passed my birthday, I was just 19 you know;
When I thought of all I’d planned to do, it seems so hard to die,
But now I pray to God for grace, and all my cares gone by.”

And here his voice grew weaker as he partly raised his head,
And whispered "Good-bye, Mother," and your soldier boy was dead.

I carved it on his headboard, as skillful as I could,
And if you wish to find it, I can tell you where it stood;
I send you back his hymn book, the cap he used to wear,
The lock I cut the night before, from his bright and curly hair;
I send you back his Bible; the night before he died,
I turned its leaves together and read it by his side;
I keep the belt he was wearing, he told me so to do,
It has a hole up on the side, just where the ball went through.

So now I've done his bidding, there is nothing more to tell;
But I shall always mourn with you the boy we loved so well.

Thank you very much for inviting me to share these thoughts with you.