

Holiday Salute



Paying Your Respects

Consider a holiday trip that honors our soldiers' ultimate sacrifices

With time off each year, there's ample opportunity to schedule visits to monuments and memorials that honor America's fallen service members. Here are several recommendations, found from one side of the country to another — with a few stops in between.

ARLINGTON NATIONAL CEMETERY

Arlington, Virginia

Our country's best-known military cemetery sits on land once owned by Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee. Arlington National is the final resting place for hundreds of thousands of military veterans and their dependents. Visitors are encouraged to visit the solemn Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, a white marble sarcophagus created in 1921 to recognize anonymous service members who were killed in action.

Elsewhere, you will find the graves of former presidents John F. Kennedy and William Howard Taft, among others.

NATIONAL MEMORIAL ARCH

Valley Forge, Pennsylvania

The fledgling Continental Army struggled through a brutal winter in 1777-78, as more than 2,500 soldiers lost their lives due to disease, exposure and starvation at their encamp-



USS Arizona Memorial in Pearl Harbor, Honolulu, Hawaii.

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ment in Valley Forge. The National Memorial Arch honors their service and their memory. Of course, Valley Forge is also known as the spot where Gen. George Washington's war-turning advance later began.

NATIONAL WORLD WAR I MUSEUM AND MEMORIAL

Kansas City, Missouri

The Liberty Memorial opened in 1926, and was designated by Congress as the country's official World War I memorial in 2004. Exhibits retrace the Great War and related events from 1914 through the peace

conference in 1919 in Paris.

NATIONAL WORLD WAR II MUSEUM

New Orleans, Louisiana

Formerly known as the National D-Day Museum, this facility was likewise designated as the nation's official World War II memorial by Congress in 2004. Rotating exhibits are paired with an impressive array of memorabilia. The museum was built in New Orleans to recognize the city's role in winning the war in Europe: Amphibious boats used to transport troops

were designed and built by the local Higgins Industries.

USS ARIZONA MEMORIAL

Pearl Harbor, Honolulu, Hawaii

Nearly 2,000 crewmen died when the USS Arizona took a direct hit during the December 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor that drew America into World War II. The shipwreck was declared a national shrine in 1962, and now honors those who were killed on a date which President Franklin D. Roosevelt rightly said "will live

in infamy."

NATIONAL MEDAL OF HONOR HERITAGE CENTER

Chattanooga, Tennessee

Officially opened on Feb. 22, 2020, the National Medal of Honor Heritage Center serves as a lasting tribute to the recipients of the first Medals of Honor and all recipients since. The center reverently underscores both the heritage of the Medal of Honor and the sacrifices made by various recipients from the Civil War to the Global War on Terror.

Patriotic Displays

Show off your pride in America, but don't forget the rules

Displaying the flag outside your home is one of the most common ways we celebrate our country and the military's commitment to service. But before you do, familiarize yourself with the regulations found in the U.S. Flag Code. There are specific ways Old Glory is to be handled, displayed and retired from service.

INSIDE THE CODE

The U.S. Flag Code was approved in June 1923, and is meant to guide patriotic residents through every step of the process. Each element of the code ensures that the flag is treated with the dignity and respect befitting this symbol of our nation. All of the following rules are found in text from United States Code Title 4 Chapter 1.

OUTDOOR RULES

Correctly flying Old Glory during the holiday season involves following a few simple rules. The banner should only be on display from sunrise to sunset, unless the building or outdoor staff is brightly lit. American flags should be flown at the peak of a staff or stationary pole, unless they have been ordered to half-staff. Purchase flags that are marked for all weather, since they are more durable in rain and wind and more



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resistant to fading or tearing.

FLYING AT HALF-STAFF

American flags are supposed to be flown at the peak of your staff or pole. There are regular occasions, however, when it's to be lowered half-way down – including Memorial Day, which honors

military members who died in action. Elected officials may also order flags to half-staff when there has been a local or national tragedy, the death of a high-ranking official, or during a national emergency.

RETIRING THE FLAG

If your banner has begun

to deteriorate over time, it's important to retire it with all due respect. The U.S. Flag Code provides strict guidelines. The flag should be folded, then burned in a fire that is intense enough to completely consume the material. As it burns, citizens should participate in a brief

moment of silence, say the Pledge of Allegiance or simply salute the flag. Once the banner has completely burned, be sure to safely extinguish the ashes. If you have more questions, contact your local VFW post to find out more about local flag-burning ceremonies.

Holiday Viewing

Mix in some patriotic movies among your traditional Yuletide favorites

There are plenty of thought-provoking military-themed movies to be enjoyed, from 1970's "Patton" and 1986's "Platoon" to 1998's "Saving Private Ryan" and 2012's "Lincoln." But this time of year offers us all an opportunity to honor the particular sacrifices made by those who are serving in the military away from home and family during the holiday season.

Of course, time spent apart during this special time has always sparked films — as well as books and songs — but the plight of our service members and their loved ones has garnered an increasing spotlight lately.

Tributes to their service have proliferated in patriotic holiday movies, perhaps most consistently on the Hallmark channel. The network's patriotic holiday movies include "Christmas Bedtime Stories" (2022), "USS Christmas" (2021), "Five More Minutes" (2021), "Operation Christmas Drop" (2020), "A Homecoming for the Holidays" (2019), "Write Before Christmas" (2019), "Time for You to Come Home for Christmas" (2019), "Christmas Homecoming" (2017), "Home for Christmas Day" (2017) and "The Christmas Note" (2015), among others.

Filmed on location in Norfolk, Virginia, "USS



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Christmas" was written by TV news correspondent Andrea Canning, who is married to an ex-Marine Corps fighter pilot. "Five More Minutes" is set around the former Fort Bragg, and was inspired by a song of the same name by Scott McCreery, winner of the 10th season of "American Idol."

If you're more interested in

the classics, cue up 1954's Michael Curtis-directed "White Christmas" movie-musical starring Bing Crosby, Rosemary Clooney and Danny Kaye, among others. Crosby and Kaye run into their former Major General while traveling as musical performers — only to discover that he's now penniless. They band together

to raise money for their former officer, and to raise some Christmas cheer, as well.

Director Billy Wilder's '50s-era "Stalag 17" starred Oscar-winner William Holden as a World War II prisoner of war and was set during the holiday season. The star of 1946's "It's a Wonderful Life," James Stewart, is a World War II vet-

eran, unlike his character George Bailey. Stewart was heralded as the first American movie star to enlist, joining at age 33. More recently, 1992's "A Midnight Clear" told the fictional account of a brief Christmas truce between American and German soldiers just before World War II's furious Battle of the Bulge.

What the Medals Mean

Here's how to decode the incredible accomplishments each represents

Service personnel typically only wear their medals on special occasions. Otherwise, they're likely displayed at home or perhaps tucked away in a drawer. Those humble settings don't adequately tell the stories of bravery and valor behind each and every medal.

Familiarize yourself with their meaning before gathering at the family dinner table during the holidays. You'll have an entirely new appreciation for the sacrifices your relatives made in service of our country.

MEDAL OF HONOR

The nation's highest military honor awarded by Congress is presented by the president, and honors conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of life above and beyond the call of duty. The medal was introduced in 1861, which created the Navy's Medal of Honor. Specific medals now exist for the Navy and Marine Corps, the Army, Air and Space Forces, and the Coast Guard.

THE PURPLE HEART

This medal is awarded in recognition and thankfulness to those who have been wounded in combat. Those who are eligible for a Purple Heart include anyone who served on or after April 5, 1917, when the U.S. joined



Medals of Honor for the Air Force, Army and Navy, and the ribbon accompanying the medal.

other Allied Forces in World War I. Families of fallen troops also commonly receive this award to honor their ultimate sacrifice for our country.

DISTINGUISHED SERVICE CROSS

The distinguished service cross is the nation's second-highest award for military

valor, and is awarded for acts of bravery that do not rise to the level of a Medal of Honor. The medal was established in 1918, and follows the Medal of Honor's rules by having separate recognition for the Army, the Navy (the Navy Cross, which includes the Marine Corps), the Air Force and Space Force (Air Force Cross)

and Coast Guard (Coast Guard Cross).

SILVER STAR

The third-highest decoration for members of our armed forces recognizes gallantry in action with requirements below those of branch-specific service crosses and the Medal of Honor.

DISTINGUISHED SERVICE MEDAL

This medal was established in 1918 and is awarded for meritorious service in a duty of great responsibility. The Army Distinguished Service Medal was established in 1918, followed by similar medals for the other branches of the armed forces.

How To Give Back

Remember the military and their family during the holiday season

This time of year is all about family, but unfortunately members of our armed forces don't always enjoy that luxury. This puts an emotional strain on both those serving and the loved ones who've been temporarily left behind.

The good news is, there are a variety of ways for you to reach out and show gratitude for their service. You can volunteer your time, donate money, or help out with holiday-themed outreach efforts.

ADOPT A MILITARY FAMILY

Families who are celebrating without their service member may feel lonely, stressed and overwhelmed by financial problems. Make the season brighter by "adopting" them. That may mean stopping by to help with chores, baby or pet sitting, or assisting with their financial burdens. Purchase prepaid gift cards that can be directed to everyday necessities like gas, groceries or household essentials.

Buy a special present if there are small children who will miss their parent this holiday season. Offer to chip in so kids can continue to pursue their personal interests or hobbies, whether that means carpooling, serving as an assistant coach, or helping out by buying needed materials. Be open to the



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family's specific needs, and help fill whatever voids are temporarily in place. It will be a great relief to our brave members of the armed services, while helping ease the pain of those they're so far away from.

VOLUNTEERING OPPORTUNITIES

Your local VA hospital is likely always in need of volunteer

help, but particularly during the holidays when there are special events and activities planned. Ask local representatives about volunteer opportunities, even if it's just to spend quality time with the patients. Other volunteer opportunities may be available through the local VFW, or human-resource directors at area veterans homes. Some older veterans

may not have friends or family to spend the holidays with, and your presence could make all the difference.

MAKE A DONATION

Seek out local non-profits that distribute filled stockings to spread holiday cheer. They're typically given to both active-duty service personnel and veterans. These organiza-

tions may need help with donations, gifts or letters, filling the stockings themselves or delivering them. If no one in your area is participating in this fun and meaningful holiday activity, consider finding a community partner and starting your own stocking drive. Just make sure you have plenty of helpers to complete packaging and distribution.

Know Your Military Holidays

Each of these annual commemorations has its own special meaning

The service and risks taken by members of our armed forces while defending America should be remembered year-round. We also have specific holidays dedicated to honoring the military which are spread out across the calendar and highlight their courage, bravery and sacrifice. Unfortunately, some confuse the meanings behind Memorial Day, Veteran's Day and Armed Forces Day. Here's what they recognize:

ARMED FORCES DAY

Held on the third Saturday in May, Armed Forces Day pays tribute to all active personnel in our armed forces. Prior to 1949, each individual branch of the military had its own day of recognition for those currently serving. Secretary of Defense Louis Johnson announced a single holiday in conjunction with the unification of all branches under the new Department of Defense. The Army, Air Force and Navy discontinued their specific days, though the Marine Corps Day continues.

MEMORIAL DAY

Memorial Day honors those who died while in military service. Originally celebrated on May 30, the date has been permanently moved to the last



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Monday in May as part of the Congress' Uniform Monday Holiday Act of 1971. This holiday was originally called Decoration Day, and commemorated sacrifices made by Civil War soldiers beginning in 1868. A small flag is now placed on each grave at the sprawling Arlington National Cemetery on Memorial Day.

VETERAN'S DAY

Celebrated annually every Nov. 11, this holiday celebrates American veterans from all wars. The date was originally chosen to commemorate the end of World War I, as Allied Forces and Germany signed an armistice on the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month in 1918. The holiday was originally known

as Armistice Day, before being updated to honor all service members in June 1954.

OTHER KEY DATES

Other key military-related dates throughout the year include the Navy Reserve's birthday on March 3, Gold Star Wives Day on April 5, the Air Force Reserve's birthday on April 14, the Army

Reserve's birthday on April 23, the Army's birthday on June 14, the Coast Guard's birthday on Aug. 4, the Air Force's birthday on Sept. 18, Gold Star Spouse's DAY and Father's Day on the last Sunday in September, the Navy's birthday on Oct. 13 and the Marine Corps birthday on Nov. 10.

Sending Your Thanks

Take a moment to thank those who keep us safe every day

Sending an encouraging message has never been easier, thanks to email, video upload and social media. Even if you prefer to communicate with old-fashioned letters, it's a great time to take a moment and reach out. Being away from loved ones during the holidays adds another layer of emotion to their everyday sacrifice. Here are three easy ways to express your gratitude.

BY EMAIL

Sending an email may seem more impersonal than a handwritten note but for those who you know personally, it's the easiest and fastest way to reach out. Pack your note with lots of news from home, with updates on friends, family and things of local interest. Ask if there is anything you can do to make their service any easier.

They may want you to check on people back home, or send pictures of loved ones or their pets. Close with a note of gratitude. Ask your service member if there are others who may need an encouraging word, and get their email addresses, too. These warm reminders of home provide welcome distractions anytime, but particularly during the holidays.

BY LETTER

There's a reason this is such



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a tried-and-true method of communication with soldiers. Receiving a personal note when you're miles away opens a conversation while providing an instant keepsake. Let them know how important their sacrifice is to everyone back home. Letters also give you a chance to share photos. There are ways to connect,

even if you don't have a family member or friend who's serving elsewhere during the holidays.

Military pen-pal services like Forgotten Soldiers Outreach, Operation Gratitude and AnySoldier can connect anyone with service personnel who might appreciate an encouraging note. Begin these

notes with generic salutations like "Dear Hero," while thanking them for their service. If you feel comfortable, share stories of your time or a family member's time in the military. Include a return address in case they want to respond.

BY VIDEO

Services members may have

access to video conferencing software like Skype or Google Meet, which allows real-time conversations with family and friends. Unreliable internet service might make these connections difficult to maintain, in particular with overseas military installations, but it's worth the effort to pass along face-to-face holiday greetings.