

Remembered Numbers, Forgotten Individuals **By Jackson Owen**

Blood.
Our nation is built on the blood of heroes.
Their names are etched on street signs and on gravestones
Woven into the tapestry of history;
Sewn into the fabric of our curriculums and essays.
“3,000 Americans fell at Omaha Beach”, we learn.
“The stalemate of the Korean War turned into a meat grinder” we learn.
“Viet Cong guerillas cost many GI’s their lives in the jungles of Vietnam”, we’re told.
116,708.
407,316.
58,220.
These are numbers that become impossible to fathom when you’re sitting in a steamy
Classroom waiting for school to end.
These men and women were raised and cherished by their families.
They were adored by girlfriends, boyfriends and spouses.
They enjoyed life and its many comforts like all people.
They loved their country so much they risked it all to preserve it for their American
Brothers and sisters.
They fell at Corregidor and Carentan;
At Hamburger Hill and Khe Sanh;
At Belleau Wood and the banks of the Meuse;
At Inchon and the Chosin Reservoir;
At Fallujah and in the streets of Kabul.
They were helping the wounded man under their boots or the dying one ahead of them.
They were sacrificing their potential lives for their brothers and sisters in arms.
They were praying to Jesus, Muhammad, Allah, Yahweh, Buddha or Vishnu.
They were reminiscing about John from the hardware store or Jane from the prom back home.
They were guarding the country they treasured.
And now the woes and sacrifices of those selfless enough to exchange their life for freedom,
Risk neglect.
116,708.
407,316.
58,220.
But the numbers are just that – numbers.
Everyone forgets the individuals behind the digits;
The personalities lost between the ink and paper
And the lives they left behind in the dirt of:
France,
Germany,
Korea,
Iraq,
Afghanistan
And countless other places.

Most forget the lessons left behind by those lost.
They present a warning to humanity -
A warning to those driving policy.
A warning that war is hell; that war cost countless Americans their futures.
At a time of ignorance of the annals of history and common sense, the stone can't be ignored.
The rows of names hammered into the granite or marble or quartz that form our memorials can't
Be covered.
The flags cannot be disregarded.
One can't help staring at a memorial and feel pride for one's country;
Feel the pride those who are honored felt when they enlisted,
Or even when they fell.
While many today argue over history, it's hard to debate the importance the men and women who
died for America have on our national identity.
It brings a common experience.
It brings scars.
It brings unity at a time when cooperation and harmony are in short supply.
Without the monuments we strive through time, parakeets of the past
Constantly repeating history
So, while we may learn the numbers of our conflicts in class
And their causes
And their effects
And their leaders
And their battles,
Nothing can replace the tangible reminder of a monument.
Nothing can refresh our memories like the plaques that line its perimeter.
Nothing can warn us quite like the personifications of the numbers we learn in school.
Nothing can deter us quite like a column of names.
In the end, it is the only thing protecting us from our own pride;
Our own aloofness;
Our own amnesia;
Our own ambition;
Our own cruelty;
Our own greed
Because nothing can demonstrate the danger of these behaviors better than the memory of the
people who were killed by them.