

From

COLONISTS TO COUNTRYMEN: A MEMORIAL DAY

RETROSPECTIVE.



At daybreak, April 19, 1775, British muskets felled seven militiamen arrayed against the Redcoats on *Lexington Common*. A patriot broadside wrote: “The public most sincerely sympathize with the friends and relations of our deceased brethren, who gloriously sacrificed their lives in fighting for the liberties of their country. By their noble, intrepid conduct . . . they have endeared their memories to the present generation who will transmit their names to posterity with the highest honor.”

News of the bloodshed in *Massachusetts* reached *Virginia* by express rider, relayed by Committees of Correspondence. In *Williamsburg*, that rebellious colony’s capital, the VIRGINIA GAZETTE published the dispatches in a bulletin that concluded, “The Sword is now drawn, and God Knows when it will be sheathed.” Six years later, Providence brought GENERAL GEORGE WASHINGTON and LE COMPTE DE ROCHAMBEAU to the city to plan the siege of *Yorktown*. The war ended on *Williamsburg’s* doorstep.

This April 19, two-hundred twenty-nine years later, the morning newspapers reported Pentagon confirmation of seven more American soldiers dead in the field. About 1,101,000 soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines have now mustered into the ranks of the Lexington men. On Memorial Day we honor every one.

Dedicated this weekend in *Washington*, the NATIONAL WORLD WAR II MEMORIAL commemorates the loss of 400,000 servicemen and servicewomen in the Atlantic and Pacific Theaters sixty years ago. But no matter the conflict, every life given in freedom’s defense is remembered.

It is an occasion to reflect on the lessons of history, on the legacy of independence, and on the hopes the founders cherished for the nation when many were familiar figures on *Williamsburg’s* streets. Such patriots as *George Washington*.

In 1783, on the anniversary of that fateful morning in *Massachusetts*, he ordered that “the Cessation of Hostilities between the United States of America and the King of Great Britain” be proclaimed to his troops.

Washington said that “It must afford the most rational and sincere satisfaction to every benevolent mind, as it puts a period to a long and doubtful contest, stops the effusion of human blood, opens the prospect to a more splendid scene, and like another morning star, promises the approach of a brighter day . . . a day which is the harbinger of Peace.”

On Memorial Day, in ceremonies in *Williamsburg*, *Lexington*, and communities throughout the nation and the world, we honor all those whose sacrifice promises the approach of a brighter day.

AMERICA. CHAPTER I.

Colonial Williamsburg

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