

Notes from the President

Georgia Institute of Technology

G.P. "Bud" Peterson, President

Reflections on Memorial Day 2018

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Every Georgia Tech Commencement ceremony includes a moment when we ask the military personnel on hand — past and current — to stand and be recognized. Four times earlier this month, at each of our ceremonies in McCamish Pavilion, these brave patriots were given a hearty round of applause. It's always inspiring to hear and adds further poignancy to a day already full of deep meaning for thousands of our newest graduates and their family, friends, and supporters.



If Commencement can be viewed as an early bookend to the month of May at Georgia Tech, then the other natural bookend is Memorial Day, which this year falls on Monday, May 28. Two such disparate occasions — one joyful, the other somber — but inextricably connected as celebrations of freedom afforded to us by the sacrifices of all Americans who have served in the military, but especially the more than 1.35 million who made the ultimate sacrifice from the American Revolution to our contemporary hostilities in the Middle East and the many conflicts in between.

On May 24-25 from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m., **Georgia Tech's Veterans Resource Center** will commemorate in advance this important day with displays and information in the Peachtree Room in the Stamps Student Center Commons about the Institute's proud military history. Coffee and refreshments will be served, and we invite everyone to stop by and learn about this part of our history.

We also close Georgia Tech's campus on Memorial Day to honor those who have served. It is a national rite during which Americans are encouraged to slow down, reflect, and consider the high cost paid by so many who have come before us. And we recall that this time of year is especially meaningful for those in "the Greatest Generation" that helped America survive through the dark days of World War II. Seventy-three years ago on May 8, 1945, Germany signed an act of military surrender, and the world celebrated V-E Day — Victory in Europe.

One of my most cherished memories during my time as Georgia Tech's president came in 2014, when Val and I were in Metz, France, for the inauguration of the Institut Lafayette, part of Georgia Tech-Lorraine. General Philip Breedlove, Supreme Allied Commander for Europe at the NATO Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE), arranged for about 250 students

studying at GTL to attend the 70th anniversary celebration of the D-Day invasion in Normandy, France.

As a 1977 Georgia Tech civil engineering graduate, Gen. Breedlove, who has since retired and returned to the Institute as a Distinguished Professor in The Sam Nunn School of International Affairs, already knew how to get things done. As Supreme Allied Commander, he was able to provide a younger generation of his fellow Yellow Jackets with an unforgettable experience. Many of the American soldiers who landed in Normandy on D-Day on June 6, 1944, were around the same age as our students, who, just by being at that historic site, could envision the terrible reality of the human toll extracted.

Almost 9,400 are buried in the 173-acre American cemetery that overlooks Omaha Beach, one of the principal landing areas during the invasion. A nearby memorial wall shows the names of 1,557 additional American service members who perished in the Normandy campaign but could not be located or identified.

Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower was the first to serve in the Supreme Allied Commander Europe position that Gen. Breedlove later held. In this role, Gen. Eisenhower led Operation Overlord, which began the liberation of Western Europe in World War II. During the war and afterward as America's 34th president, he spoke movingly about the sacrifice of our country's warriors and the price they have paid throughout our history. It was still on his mind during his inaugural address as he assumed the presidency in 1953, when he said, "**Americans, indeed, all free men, remember that in the final choice a soldier's pack is not so heavy a burden as a prisoner's chains.**"

For many of us, Memorial Day 2018 will provide an opportunity to relax, socialize with friends and family, perhaps fire up the grill for a cookout, and remember those who have made our freedoms possible. The Georgia Tech leadership hopes you have a safe, meaningful 2018 Memorial Day and that you take a moment to reflect upon and honor all those who have served, and especially those who perished, so that we could live free. God bless America!

G.P. "Bud" Peterson