



# SMALL WARS

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## JOURNAL

### Remember Us

By [Robert Bateman](#)

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Sunday matters. Or, more particularly, this coming Sunday matters.

It does not matter to me because of the football games that will be played or the tailgating that will occur. Nor do I care overmuch about the regularly scheduled worship services that some religions will hold on this day. The weather will not affect the importance of this coming Sunday for me. Nor should it for you. What matters is that this coming Sunday is Veterans Day.

It is difficult to make the connection, perhaps, for most people. Almost all of our First World War veterans are gone now, and the news reports tell me that the men who fought World War II are dying at the rate of 1,000 a day. More modern veterans are fading as well, while the current military is made up of less than one half of one percent of the American public. But on this day, perhaps, we might appeal and ask that those who have given the last full measure of their devotion, be faithfully recalled by their nation.

They are honored so elsewhere.

A close friend of mine holds dual French and American passports. This is not surprising, as his parents were both college professors teaching the French language to Americans at an elite college. This college was known for their language programs, and for "immersion" study overseas. He passed to me one of the most appropriate reminders for this day of remembrance. I would ask that you make one quiet moment this coming Sunday to contemplate this tale:

One of my more vivid childhood memories involves a visit to the Normandy beaches and U.S. military cemeteries there when I was 8 or 9 years old.

Every year, my father would organize bus trips for the students from his college then studying in France. One was almost always the Chateaux de la Loire (my favorite), and the other was the Mont St. Michel and the Normandy beaches (which I loved and considered akin to a boring and somber museum visit, respectively). My dad and his administrative assistant -- a very, very dour and formidable 60-something who was very old-school and addressed me as "vous" when she was pleased with me and "jeune homme" when she was not -- would pack about 30-60 college juniors into one or two buses and head off to these destinations, often unable to arrange formal organized tours in advance. She was not a big fan of the United States, and disapproved of the typical college student antics.

On one visit to the D-Day beaches -- it must have been 1979 or 1980, based on my memory of the sartorial, uh, insouciance on display -- one of the students decided to bring his giant boom box into a U.S. military cemetery and groove amongst the crosses and Stars of David. While the group walked staidly on the path, with a guide explaining the whos, wheres, and how manys, the student

turned on the boom box.

My dad's assistant's face turned ashen and then a shade of red I have never seen since. She marched over, shaking with fury, gripped his ear firmly and dragged him face-to-cross with one of the gravestones, and demanded that he read the name and the age of the Soldier buried there. He dropped his boom box but could not get free, as she loudly declared, in her thick French accent, " 'Ee was nine-tee-neuh. He sack-reefized eez life for France and for yeuh. Yeuh weel chaud eem zeuh respeck ee daysayrves, ohr yeuh weel deel wiz me agan!"

We were there for two days. We did not see the boom box again. On day two, the students switched their shorts for pants and were especially attentive to the guided tours.

11/11, Please remember us. Thank you.

Write to LTC [Bob Batemen](#).

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### About the Author



#### [Robert Bateman](#)

Lieutenant Colonel Robert L. Bateman is an infantryman, historian and prolific writer. Bateman was a Military Fellow at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) and has taught Military History at the U.S. Military Academy. He is currently stationed in Washington, D.C. Bateman has authored two books: "Digital War, A View from the Front Lines" (Presidio: 1999) and "No Gun Ri, A Military History of the Korean War Incident" (Stackpole, 2002). He's also contributed to or co-authored seven more. Bateman's byline has appeared on more than 300 print and major national web site articles.

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