Memorial Day.
Oh, yes, another day I don't have to go to work. Don't have to get up early, lounge around the house all day in my PJ's and watch television, read and maybe mow the lawn.
The word Memorial means something special. It means men and women died for our country. It means they fought for our freedom. It means we are still a free country because they went to war FOR US!
So what is Memorial Day?
We go to the cemetery, listen to a speech or two, hear taps, maybe walk through the cemetery — then we go home. We did our duty, and we honored our country.

Every Memorial Day my mind travels through the span of time. I'm no longer publisher of a community newspaper. I'm 21 years old, wearing green fatigues and carrying an M-16 rifle.
On my back is all my worldly belongings at that moment — my toothbrush, my blanket, a dry pair of socks, maybe a little food and a canteen of water.
Strapped to all of that is a combat radio.
I'm the RTO (Radio Telephone Operator) for the old man (Capt. Beckman).
I know the North Vietnamese want to eliminate the captain of the unit, and his means of communication, the RTO. So with every breath I'm careful to watch where I'm going … I keep up with the captain, but my thoughts are on survival.
Every step of the way I'm watching to see if there's a tree, or a rock, a small hill or a cemetery marker I can hide behind when the shooting begins.
It's one of those nights spent mostly on the ground. The captain keeps barking orders — "call all the other RTO's and tell them to be careful. We have word of a VC (Viet Cong) special forces unit moving in our area. They're dangerous," the captain says. I relay the message.
Then we sit and wait through another long night — wondering if tonight will be the night we face the enemy.
Little did I know tomorrow would be the extreme test of a man's soul. It was dark all around me, nobody dared breath out loud. And nobody slept.
The next day we were headed up a hill when the shooting started.
My friend Rocky came crawling past me, going up hill as fast as he could on all fours.
"Where are you going?" I yelled, almost in disgust. "Obe (another of our friends, "O'Brien by name) is up there," Rocky said.
Suddenly I heard more shots and was in fear because my two best friends were heading into the direction of the shooting.
That was just the start of a day that would live in my memory forever.
I watched the body of a fellow I knew as it was put on a helicopter and whisked away to our base camp. I watched them patch up a fellow RTO who no longer had two eyes in his head. I

was there when a Lieutenant grabbed his bloody body and asked me to reach into his pocket and get his cigarettes for him — only to find he no longer had pockets, or part of his leg.
When I was rushed to the perimeter to stand guard, I laid on that hill and cried.
Later that day our unit found the downed helicopter pilots we were seeking.
We heard the VC pounding on the helicopter as we got close — apparently removing parts. But the pilots, wounded but alive, were found hiding by a river.
But I wasn't there. I was one of four men chosen to "guard" the trail our troops were taking, "Just in case the enemy returned."
Then they left.
We were stricken with a sudden fear and we armed ourselves the best we could.
That night, without our unit returning, we sat in the middle of the trail, two facing north, two facing south, back-to-back, M-16's at the ready.
"Did you hear that," I whispered to my friend O'Brien. "Yeah, somebody is crawling through the brush," he said.
"Is this it?" I said with extreme panic in my voice.
"Yes, I think it is," said O'Brien.
We both knew the enemy was near and it was time to fight.
Then, just as my heart was about to explode from my body as it pounded so loudly I was sure everyone heard — an American voice spoke up from the brush. "It's one of our guys," O'Brien said.
I began to breath again. Within moments we re-joined our unit. Why do I mention this?
Because, on Memorial Day you might think about staying in your PJ's all day.
Or you might see veterans marching and decide to pass by them.
Instead, think about the veterans who are facing these kinds of tests … and worse.
They're far away from home, they're lonesome and they're scared. So were many who already died.
This is not a special day for you to relax and enjoy. It's a day to remember, to recall, to know that Freedom is never Free. It's bought and paid for, and you don't have to agree with the war. You just have to support those who fought them. This Memorial Day … remember!

THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK: As my Ole Pappy used to say, "Now is the time for all good men to come to the aid of their country."
Ole Pappy was a patriot. He fought in World War II. He served on a submarine tender, which brought supplies to submarines. And he saw his share of war. And yet, he always told me it was a proud thing to serve your country. So I did.