



Published September 27th, 2023

Letters to the editor

Lafayette Crosses

I am a US Army veteran who loves the Lafayette Crosses. I write because there have been so many letters to you recently which have been so negative about them that I thought I might try to offer a different perspective. And perhaps suggest a compromise.

Let me begin by acknowledging that my deployment for a year as an infantry officer leading night ambush patrols under fire does not qualify me at all to tell anyone how to respond to places of reverence. I can only describe the experiences I have had when out visiting them and say that based on many, many conversations I have had with fellow combat vets over decades now those experiences are strikingly similar. In a nutshell, we walk around and in between the crosses (and, of course, the Stars of David, the Buddhist faith emblems, and so on) and we talk to the fallen. We thank them, naturally, we express guilt feelings that we survived and somehow, they did not, and sometimes we tell them how sorry we are that their lives were unnecessarily taken by stupid decisions our leaders made, many of whom never served a day in uniform. Over the course of a walk, our emotions range widely from pride to outrage and beyond. To have a place like this to attend on Memorial Day or Veteran's Day or July 4 or 9/11 is a kind of restabilization we - and maybe many non-vets too - need from time to time. The placard at the top of the hill which formerly carried a number of the dead, updated from time to time, was not maudlin but truly stunning.

Some of the negative letters said that combat vets don't like the crosses because they don't have names but the vets I walk with strongly disagree. We remind all that any simple visit to the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier shows that names are not needed. (Actually, quite a few crosses do have names and touching personal notes). Before the crosses I would visit the Presidio cemetery and while on my walks there I obviously saw names but I rarely remembered those particulars and did not need to do so in order to accomplish my mission.

That mission was and is to continue my practice of thanking and remembering and regretting and just having intensely human emotions at a tragic sight. One of the letters to you said we have "moved on" and that we need need to erect condos so as to avoid the eyesore of worn out pieces of wood but I truly hope for our nation that we never move on from such a place of reverence. It is simply not enough to watch a TV show of patriotic songs, one must walk that walk and experience it first hand.

But wooden crosses don't last forever. Like our uniforms they fade, and so I suggest that when the time comes to do something, then it should include preserving a decent -sized (not tiny and tucked into a corner) parcel with upgraded crosses and Stars and Buddhist signs of faith. Names are not needed, just the opportunity to be there and feel, really feel, the suffering and the sacrifice that we vets placed our lives on the line to honor and preserve.

William Norman
Orinda

Lafayette Hillside Memorial

In response to the Moraga letter regarding the Lafayette Hillside Memorial, I would like to say that he has every right to genuinely react to the memorial as he does, as the Memorial brings up strong feelings for people, all of which are valid. However, before assuming that the people involved in erecting this memorial did not care about the victims of these wars, I would suggest that he inquire further into the history of the memorial and those who were involved in its conception and execution. This memorial was put up on private property by a group of all-volunteers, with no financial backing or help, other than their own personal contributions of money, time and donated materials. The memorial has continued to be preserved in the same way. These symbols were made simply in the backyards of local people's homes with scrap wood and other materials. The intent was to show the extent to which these wars cost and hurt individuals, and further to try to impress upon the public the great number of lives lost. Many of those working on the hillside can assure you that countless times there were veterans and relatives of veterans who came there to personally mourn their losses. And, yes, many of the symbols are personalized by family members and are not anonymous; in fact, one has just been added recently. The appearance of the memorial may not be as polished as some, but it has its purpose to remind us to be grateful for the sacrifices made and the tragic costs of war.

Kay James
Moraga

To whom it may concern

Having recently moved to Lafayette, and only slightly less recently become a citizen of this country (30 years and counting), I am saddened to read the two recent letters in your publication (9/13/23 issue). I read them both with curiosity, especially ex Medical Service Corps officer John Dutton's. While I understand his points about the power of memorials showing the names of the fallen, I think there is an equally strong and powerful point about memorializing war, death, and destruction, and that is - many of the slain victims who have fallen in conflict zones around the world remain unidentified and unnamed. In a word, they remain "unknown", often being buried in unmarked graves.

As a child visiting Westminster Abbey in London, I was dumbstruck when someone explained the meaning

and reason behind the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier there. The power of a memorial to the un-named is equally inspiring and moving, and for me, fills the gap of ensuring that all slain victims in all conflicts - both named and unnamed - are remembered.

Later in life, I was struck by the power of three words I started seeing on memorials around the world. First used in 1897, by Rudyard Kipling (a poem called: Recessional) the phrase "Lest We Forget" is so simple and yet so powerful, and I have subsequently seen these three words on many memorials around the world. I have also seen many memorials to The Unknown Soldier in my travels. Clearly, these concepts have universal meaning.

And so, returning to Lafayette, CA, where I have only recently begun to spend my time, I have to say that the Lafayette Hillside Memorial installation makes me proud to be here as it reflects the spirit and energy of a community that is thoughtful, aware, and civically engaged.

I learned the history of the Memorial by reading your recent article and visiting the Hillside Memorial's website and was surprised how controversial it was in the beginning. Now it seems to be part of the fabric of the community; something accepted and appreciated by many when I have inquired about it. It is even marked on Google Maps as The Crosses of Lafayette (whilst failing to recognize the other symbols of remembrance evident on the hillside).

Yes, the memorial is a bit weather beaten which is partly why it is so effective in reminding us to not "forget" our freedoms that are so easily taken for granted, and yet which are also so fragile. The Memorial is both a piece of history and a present-time statement giving those who drive or walk by it the chance to pause and reflect.

I end with a quote by renowned war correspondent Robert Fisk, who described war as being "primarily not about victory or defeat, but about death and the infliction of death. It represents a total failure of the human spirit."

In my view, the message that the Lafayette Hillside Memorial presents is a powerful and relevant attempt at reminding us what the opposite of that total failure can look like. For me it represents the compassionate, empowering, and honoring elements of the human spirit, and is one of the things that makes this city special.

Max Anderson
Lafayette

Updates on Crimes in Lamorinda

I frequently hear anecdotal reports of crime in our area, specifically about car theft, burglary and retail theft and, on at least one occasion, have encountered it in person. Yet, there is never any mention of crime in the Lamorinda Weekly. We have articles about wildfire preparedness, flood preparedness but never anything about the crime situation in our collective community.

Granted, we have the weekly blotter report but that tells us nothing about trends, prevention or the effectiveness of crime prevention on the part of our local police departments. Somewhere between the apocalyptic whining on 'Next Door Las Trampas' and sticking our heads in the sand and pretending there is no crime in our pristine communities, there must be a happy medium.

It would be most helpful if we could get periodic articles from the three police departments, addressing trends in crime, recommended preventative measures and the effectiveness of our police in solving crimes when they happen.

Byrne N. Sherwood, Jr.
Lafayette

Editor's note:

The Chief of the Lafayette Police gave a briefing to the Lafayette City Council and Lamorinda Weekly reported in our April 12 edition. The article can be found at www.lamorindaweekly.com/archive/issue1704/Lafayette-Police-Chief-presents-2022-crime-stats-to-council.html

Reach the reporter at: info@lamorindaweekly.com

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