**Dillard, Paul E.  "Every military headstone has a story."  The American Legion Magazine, May 2022 Commander's Message. 4**

In an Instagram photo that captured hearts the moment she posted it, Marine Sgt. Nicole Gee, 23, cradled an Afghan baby in her arms.  "I love my job," she wrote.  Six days later, on Aug. 26, 2021, Gee and 12 other U.S. servicemembers were killed in a suicide bombing outside Kabul Airport during a chaotic withdrawal of American forces.

This Memorial Day, we remember them, and more than 1 million men and women who have died in U.S. military service.  We dedicate the last Monday in May to their memory, while acknowledging that for our Gold Star families, the mourning is not limited to 24 hours a year.

We benefit from fallen Americans' sacrifices every time we exercise our constitutional rights.  We are able to speak freely, possess a firearm, peaceably assemble and vote.  Public officials don't secure us these rights.  Rather, they have been paid for in blood by those who willingly risked their lives to protect ours, from the founding of our nation to today.  As the saying goes, "All gave some, some gave all."

They are not numbers, but names and faces.  One whose story has only recently been told is Army Sgt. 1st Class Alwyn Cashe, who posthumously received the Medal of Honor last December.  On Oct. 17, 2005, his Bradley Fighting Vehicle struck an improvised explosive device while on patrol near Samarra, Iraq.  His uniform drenched in fuel and on fire, Cashe pulled six soldiers and an interpreter from the wreck, suffering burns to three-quarters of his body.  When two helicopters arrived to evacuate the wounded, he insisted on walking off the battlefield himself.  During the medevac flight to Balad Air Base, Cashe repeatedly asked after his men: "How are my guys?  What's going on with them?  Where are they at?"  Three weeks later, on Nov. 8, he died from his injuries.

From the world wars to Korea, from Vietnam to the Middle East, every U.S. military headstone has a story, and every one is inspirational in its own way.  Together, they bear witness to the selflessness described in John 15:13: "Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends."