

Don Vruwink: Remember those who gave the ultimate sacrifice

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This weekend communities across Wisconsin and the nation will celebrate Memorial Day. This is a time when we honor those who gave the ultimate sacrifice in the line of duty while serving in the United States armed forces.

In accordance with the Uniform Monday Holiday Act of 1968, Memorial Day is celebrated on the last Monday in May, but traditions of what we know and celebrate as Memorial Day have roots dating back to the Civil War. Towns across the country claim to be the birthplace of Memorial Day, as people would place flowers and decorate graves of fallen soldiers in the North and South during and right after the Civil War ended.

Memorial Day was first officially proclaimed by General John Logan, National Commander of the Grand Army of the Republic, on May 5, 1868. In his General Order No. 11, Logan proclaimed:

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“The 30th day of May, 1868, is designated for the purpose of strewing with flowers or otherwise decorating the graves of comrades who died in defense of their country during the late rebellion, and whose bodies now lie in almost every city, village, and hamlet church-yard in the land. In this observance no form of ceremony is prescribed, but posts and comrades will in their own way arrange such fitting services and testimonials of respect as circumstances may permit.”

Originally known as Decoration Day, the term Memorial Day was first used in 1882, but did not become more commonly used until after World War II. Memorial Day

was declared the official name for the holiday in 1967. The Uniform Monday Holiday Act of 1968 moved four annual holidays to a Monday, including Memorial Day. The law went into effect in 1971.

While communities across the country observe Memorial Day with parades and ceremonies, there is an official procedure required for flag observance. In the morning, the U.S. flag is raised briskly to the top of the staff and then solemnly lowered to the half-staff position until noon. It is then raised to full-staff for the remainder of the day.

The half-staff position honors the more than one million men and women who gave their lives in service to their country. At noon their memory is raised by the living, who resolve not to let their sacrifice be in vain, but to continue the fight for liberty and justice for all.

Memorial Day is much more than a three-day weekend or the start of the summer season. The holiday gives people a chance to reflect and show gratitude. Please take a moment to remember the men and women who served their country in the armed forces and gave their life in defending the ideals we cherish.

— *Vruwink, D-Milton, represents the 43rd Assembly District.*