

It's Never 2 Late

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Memorial Day History



Memorial Day, originally called Decoration Day, is a day of remembrance for those who have died in our nation's service.

Although over two dozen cities claim to be the site of the original Memorial Day celebration, in 1966, Congress and President Lyndon Johnson declared Waterloo, N.Y., the “birthplace” of Memorial Day. On May 5, 1866 the village of Waterloo, NY, honored the soldiers who had died in the Civil War by decorating their graves. Townspeople made wreaths, crosses and bouquets for each veteran's grave. A processional was held to the town's cemeteries.



“Decoration Day” was officially proclaimed on May 5, 1868 by General John Logan, national commander of the Grand Army of the Republic, in his General Order No. 11:



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. We are organized, comrades, as our regulations tell us, for the purpose among other things, "of preserving and strengthening those kind and fraternal feelings

which have bound together the soldiers, sailors, and marines who united to suppress the late rebellion." What can aid more to assure this result than cherishing tenderly the memory of our heroic dead, who made their breasts a barricade between our country and its foes? Their soldier lives were the reveille of freedom to a race in chains, and their deaths the tattoo of rebellious tyranny in arms. We should guard their graves with sacred vigilance. All that the consecrated wealth and taste of the nation can add to their adornment and security is but a fitting tribute to the memory of her slain defenders. Let no wanton foot tread rudely on such hallowed grounds. Let pleasant paths invite the coming and going of reverent visitors and fond mourners. Let no vandalism of avarice or neglect, no ravages of time testify to the present or to the coming generations that we have forgotten as a people the cost of a free and undivided republic. If our eyes grow dull, other hands slack, and other hearts cold in the solemn trust, ours shall keep it well as long as the light and warmth of life remain to us. Let us, then, at the time appointed gather.

Decoration Day was first observed on May 30, 1868, when flowers and small American flags were placed on the graves of Union and Confederate soldiers at Arlington National Cemetery. The South did not observe this Day until after World War I, when the holiday changed from honoring just those who died fighting in the Civil War to



honoring Americans who died fighting in any war. In 1882, the name was changed to Memorial Day, but was not widely used until after World War II and was not declared the official name by Federal law until 1967.

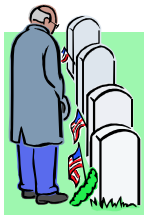
On June 28, 1968, the Congress passed the Uniform Holidays Bill, which moved four holidays, including Memorial Day, from their traditional dates to a specified Monday in order to create a convenient three-day weekend. The change moved Memorial Day from its traditional May 30 date to the last Monday in May.

In 1915, inspired by the poem "In Flanders Fields," Moina Michael conceived of an idea to wear red poppies on Memorial Day to honor those who died while serving their country during war. She sold poppies to her friends and co-workers and donated the money to veterans in need. In 1922 the VFW became the first veterans' organization



to nationally sell poppies. Two years later they began selling artificial poppies made by disabled veterans.

Today, Memorial Day marks the unofficial beginning of the summer. Families typically enjoy barbecues and picnics during the three-day holiday. The Indianapolis 500 takes place on the Sunday before Memorial Day. Many towns and cities hold Memorial Day parades honoring fallen servicemen. Volunteers place American flags on each grave site at National Cemeteries.



A "National Moment of Remembrance" resolution was passed in 2000 suggesting that at 3 p.m. local time, Americans should "voluntarily and informally observe in their own way a moment of remembrance and respect, pausing from whatever they are doing for a moment of silence or listening to 'Taps.'" The American Flag should be flown at half staff from dawn until noon, and then raised to the top of the staff until sunset.

