



REMEMBERING THE COST OF WAR

Memorial Day, a day set aside to honor those who gave the last full measure of devotion to their nation. It is important to remember this principal fact while we enjoy family outings and barbeque events so typical of this fine national holiday.

Memorial Day came about from an American tradition of cleaning graves and markers after the last winter snow was gone. They called it Decoration Day. Wisconsin families went to their churchyards and cemeteries, washed the stones, tidied the plots, and decorated them with spring flowers. A common act of the time was to then spread out blankets and have a picnic among the memorial markers.

It became a somber occasion after the American Civil War. Wisconsin sent 91,379 of its residents to fight for the Union, and 12,216 died of wounds and the diseases of war. The casualties resulted in many graves to tend, and left a heavier burden of sorrow for the families, widows and orphans.

The Civil War would not be the end of great casualties. World War 1, the Great War, added 3,932 Wisconsin graves to be remembered and decorated. The tradition of Memorial Day as a national day of remembrance of our war dead was set at this time.

The Badger State sent citizens to serve and die in many wars through the years after 1918. 8,390 military lives in World War II, 729 in the Korean War, 1,239 in Vietnam, and 127 in Iraq and Afghanistan following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. All told, 26,800 Wisconsinites have died in America's wars. That is about equal to the combined populations of Middleton and Waunakee.

Memorial Day became an official national holiday in 1971, making this year the 45th modern observance. Let us observe the day in a way that is meaningful; let us continue to clean their graves and decorate them; let us fly the colors and offer a word of thanks and respect for all they did for us; let us remember their sacrifice in the cause of freedom.

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