

Memorial Day

This is Jon Sapper for Community Comment.

Today is Memorial Day, a day of solemn remembrance for those who died serving our country and protecting our freedoms. Memorial Day has been around for almost 150 years, but it wasn't called that in the beginning. It was called Decoration Day. Henry Welles who was a druggist from Waterloo, New York, is credited with coming up with the idea of putting wreaths, crosses and flowers on the graves of Civil War soldiers who died in that war. Although other cities laid claim to coming up with the idea, Waterloo was sanctioned as the birthplace, probably because New York became the first state to officially recognize the Holiday in 1873. Almost 100 years later in 1971, Congress put into law that Memorial Day would be celebrated the last Monday in May.

I remember Memorial Day as a child growing up in Fortuna. American flags lined Main Street. I imagine we had picnics and bar-b-ques, but I remember the flags. It was a special day for my father who fought in World War II in the jungles of New Guinea. I found out why this day was important to him when reading through some of his files I found after he passed away 25 years ago. I was amazed at what I read because he never talked about those experiences. Too personal, too painful, too much of a quiet patriot believing it was his obligation and duty as an American to defend this country. When I was 8 years old though, I do remember, quite vividly, we were driving downtown one day and I asked him, "Dad, you were in the war, weren't you?" Kids back then were fascinated with war. He said "Yes, I was." I then asked him if he had ever killed anyone. He stopped the car in the middle of the road, turned his head toward me and with a cold stare looking me straight in the eye said, "NEVER ask me that question again." He had never spoken to me like that before. It wasn't until years later when I was reading those files the answer became clear why that innocent question from an 8 year old evoked such an emotional response. He served, he fought and returned home to

support his family and his community in many ways. There are over 1.3 million American men and women from America's wars who did not return home to live out their lives. They made the ultimate sacrifice.

So, why don't we see those flags lining the streets of Fortuna anymore? Probably costs too much or maybe there are other reasons. But you know, sometimes images that stir the souls and help define our character and culture as Americans are worth the cost and need to be sustained. I'll bet you those 1.3 million heroes who gave their lives for this country would agree.

This has been Jon Sapper for Community Comment.