

Tribute: Memorial Day ceremonies in Umatilla County honor fallen vets

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The origins for Memorial Day go back to the late 1860s, when the day of recognition was May 30. That remained the standard until 1971, when the Uniform Monday Holiday Act went into effect to establish the observance of certain holidays on Monday.

The change to three-day weekends, Tangney said, "contributed greatly to the general's public's nonchalant observance of Memorial Day."

Tangney closed his remarks with these words from President Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address: "...from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion — that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain."

John Cook, VFW service officer, said post members erected 141 United States casket flags in Olney for the "Avenue of

Flags" to honor the local fallen. The flags stay up until Tuesday morning. He asked anyone who would like to volunteer taking down the flags to pitch in.

The VFW was not alone in recognizing the significance of the day. Oregon Grain Growers Brand Distillery at Southeast Court Avenue and Sixth Street reported continuing its tradition of the "Missing Man" table, a small, round table with seating for one to symbolize the isolation of the absent service member. The items on the table also carried symbolic meaning, from a the single red rose representing the blood service members shed to the salt on the bread plate for the tears from families waiting for the return of fathers and sons and brothers.

Pendleton's ceremony wasn't the only one in the area.

In Hermiston, family members of James "Odie" Otis Wilcox wiped away tears as the U.S. Army Honor Guard presented a flag-folding ceremony in the airman's

honor during a Memorial Day service at the Hermiston Cemetery.

Wilcox, who served in the United States Air Force, died in August 2018 at the age of 83. Born in Heppner and growing up in Hermiston, after his military service Wilcox worked for the city of Hermiston for more than 30 years and was a volunteer firefighter.

Also on hand during the Monday service that drew more than 100 people were a handful of Gold Star mothers. Ron Jardine, VFW Post 4750 commander, led the short ceremony, which was presented by members of Veterans of Foreign Wars Post No. 4750 and American Legion Post 37. A roll call featuring the names of 85 local veterans who have died in the past year was read during the service. The group also led services at Desert Lawn Memorial Cemetery in Irrigon.

Jardine, who served in the U. S. Army from 1966-68, was thrilled with those who

turned out to pay tribute to those who have served.

"It's nice to see people come out and honor our fallen comrades," Jardine said.

Jardine encouraged people to linger at the cemetery, to take some time to honor those who have served the country. Many did just that, including decorating gravesites. Others set up chairs and held informal gatherings for their loved ones.

A number of people commented to Jardine about the majesty of the Avenue of Flags, which were flapping in a slight breeze at the cemetery. Upwards of 800 casket flags — each connected to a veteran — were erected Friday. Volunteers assisted with the local veterans groups in putting up the display.

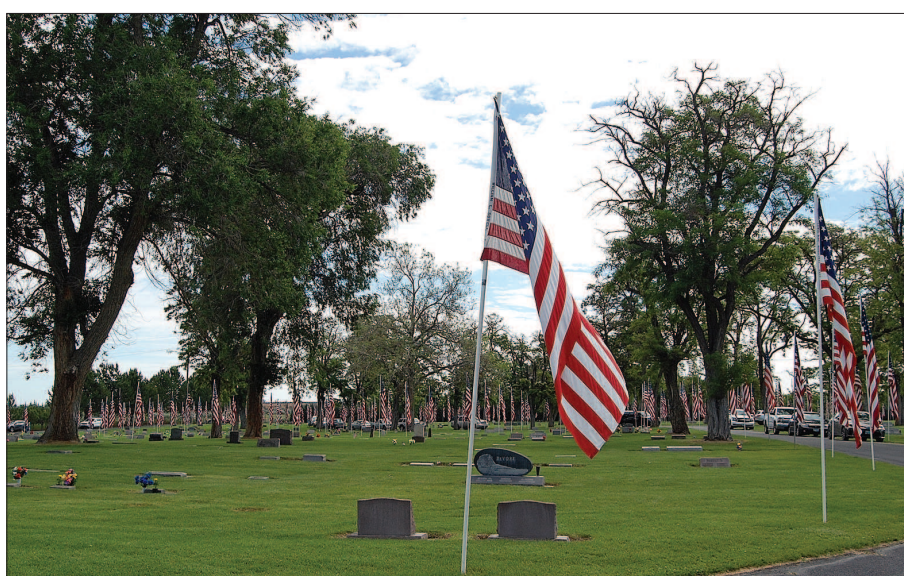
"We couldn't do it without the Hermiston High School football team and the Boy Scout troops," Jardine said. "They come and dig out the holes and help put the flags in place. It's a big job."

MEMORIAL DAY



Staff photo by Kathy Aney

Arnold Chorazy and his father Dave Chorazy play "Echo Taps" during a Memorial Day observance Monday at Olney Cemetery.



Staff photo by Tammy Malgesini

Featuring nearly 800 flags, the Avenue of Flags blows in the breeze after a Memorial Day ceremony at the Hermiston Cemetery.



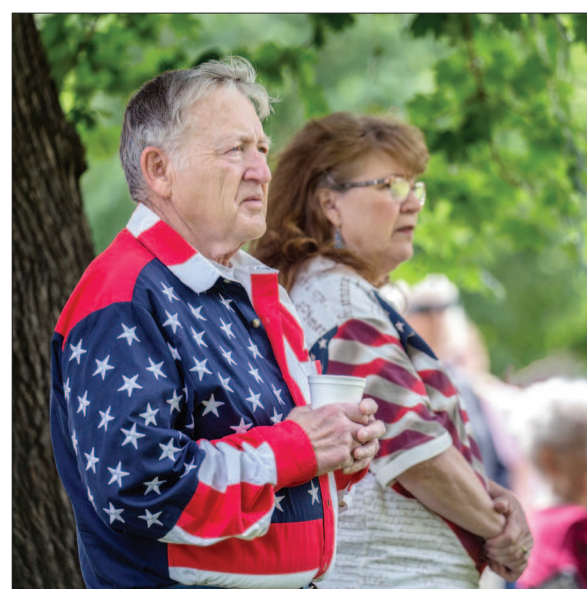
Staff photo by Kathy Aney

A member of the honor guard salutes the flag during a Memorial Day observance Monday at Olney Cemetery.



Staff photo by Kathy Aney

Sonja Sallee, member of the Pendleton Veterans of Foreign Wars auxiliary, lays a wreath during a Memorial Day observance Monday at Olney Cemetery.



Staff photo by Kathy Aney

Patriotic attire was on display during a Memorial Day observance Monday at Olney Cemetery.



Staff photo by Kathy Aney

Tom Tangney, a member of the Pendleton Veterans of Foreign Wars Let'er Buck Post 922, spoke during a Memorial Day observance Monday at Olney Cemetery.



Staff photo by Tammy Malgesini

Family members of James "Odie" Otis Wilcox look on as members of the U.S. Army National Guard present a flag-folding ceremony in the airman's honor during a Memorial Day service at the Hermiston Cemetery.