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# Perris Honors Military Sacrifices on Memorial Day



Cadets from the California Military Institute display the colors while Perris Mayor Michael Vargas looks on during the May 29 Memorial Day ceremony in Perris.

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The City of Perris paid homage to the nation's war dead at its annual Memorial Day commemoration May 29, remembering the more than one million men and women who have died while defending the United States since its founding.

Former Marine Joanne Evans once again served as master of ceremonies for the Memorial Day program, which drew about 75 people to the Perris Valley Cemetery.

Among the dignitaries were Perris Mayor Michael Vargas, Mayor Pro Tem David Starr Rabb and City Councilmembers Tonya Burke, Malcolm Corona and Rita Rogers.

Evans read off the names of 12 members of Perris American Legion Post 595 and Perris Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 888 who died in the last year. A bell chimed once for each deceased Perris Valley veteran who has taken his or her place in "Post Everlasting."

The ceremony also included a three-shot rifle volley, the playing of Taps and the appearance of about a dozen motorcyclists, some with U.S. flags fluttering in the breeze as they made their way in a solemn procession through the cemetery.



Former Marine and Master of Ceremonies Joanne Evans recites the roll of deceased veterans from Perris while Doug Kay rings a bell in their honor.

## Historic burial ground

The Perris Valley Cemetery marks the final resting place for more than 900 military veterans, including 13 from the Civil War.

The first recorded remembrance in Perris took place in 1882, when members of the Grand Army of the Republic (a Union veterans' organization) gathered to remember fallen comrades at Seventh and G streets, site of the original community cemetery. Black and white photographs mark that commemoration of what was then known as Decoration Day, which took place 29 years before Perris incorporated as a city in 1911.

Mayor Vargas remembered his father, Joe Vargas, who served in World War II and Korea. He said honoring the dead on Memorial Day drives home the point that freedom isn't free.

"Many people don't realize the cost of freedom and liberty," Vargas said. "It is definitely a privilege to honor those who served and protected us and who made the ultimate sacrifice for our freedom."

Mayor Pro Tem Rabb, a Navy gunner's mate and a veteran of the Global War on Terror, said that for many people, Memorial Day is simply another three-day weekend to relax and barbecue. But it's important to remember that, as the memory of large conflicts like World War II and Vietnam fade from the collective memory, there remain Americans in harm's way in many corners of the globe.

It is up to the current and future generations to honor those who never returned home, including soldiers like his great-,great- great-grandfather James Crowell, who died in 1864 while serving with the Union Army.

Rabb called the Perris ceremony "a beautiful event" that reminds the community today that liberty comes with a high cost.

Councilwoman Burke said Americans enjoy freedoms won by the sacrifice of veterans killed in service to the nation and by their families who grieved and still grieve for them. Those include the 650,000 dead in the Civil War, 400,000 from World War II, 116,000 from World War I and another 100,000 from Korea, Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan.

"You and I are here today because of the sacrifices they made," she said. "Any opportunity we have as a City to honor those individuals is most definitely a privilege."

Councilman Corona said Memorial Day is a lesson "to all those living that their freedom was paid for in the blood of their fellow Americans." This year's Memorial Day ceremony marked the first time Corona has attended as an elected representative and he called the Perris Valley Cemetery program "a very emotional and moving event."

Councilwoman Rogers said she considers it a duty to honor "the brave men and women who paid the ultimate sacrifice to preserve our freedom" and to remember the commitment to duty of all U.S. veterans, those living and dead.

"I'm blessed to be here to honor every one of them," Rogers said.



Perris Mayor Pro Tem David Starr Rabb, City Councilwoman Tonya Burke, City Councilwoman Rita Rogers, Mayor Michael Vargas and City Councilman Malcolm Corona stand before a monument to all veterans during the annual Memorial Day Remembrance May 29 at the Perris Valley Cemetery.

## In Flanders Field

This year's remembrance included the reading of the poem "In Flanders Fields," a haunting 15-line tribute to the victims of the slaughter that took place on the Western Front in World War I.

Lt. Col. John McCrae, a Canadian doctor and teacher, composed the poem to honor one of his former students killed in action.

McCrae was moved by the sight of red poppies growing between the freshly dug graves of so many comrades and distraught by the carnage he witnessed. He penned the poem on a scrap of paper in a few minutes, never expecting it to be published. The poem begins:

"In Flanders fields the poppies blow
Between the crosses, row by row…"

McCrae did not survive the war, dying from pneumonia in 1918.

The red poppy flower was adopted by veterans groups from Britain and Canada, and later by the U.S. Veterans of Foreign Wars and the American Legion as a symbol of remembrance of the Great War, its terrible cost and a means of raising money to support disabled veterans from all conflicts. It remains so to this day.

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