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## **Communities making Memorial Day adjustments**

By SUSAN DUNNE

Traditionally on Memorial Day, towns all over Connecticut hold parades in honor of military personnel who died on the field of battle. Flags fly at half-staff. Military planes streak by overhead. Folks gather in cemeteries to praise and pray for those who gave their lives for their country. Veterans hand out red handmade poppies to raise money for charity.

This year, because of restrictions mandated by the coronavirus pandemic, public graveside gatherings and parades are canceled. Flags fly at half-staff not just on Memorial Day but every day, to remember those who have died of COVID-19. There will be no plane flyovers. The poppies are going virtual and socially distant.

In addition, many of the aging veterans of long-ago wars, who are customarily the honored guests and chief mourners at their buddies' graves, probably will stay home to protect themselves from contagion.

### **So how can we celebrate Memorial Day?**

Some towns are planning small-scale commemorations on May 25. And there are ways to honor the fallen, and to help those who fought alongside them and survived, without gathering in large groups.

Americans should commemorate the war dead, said Lorren Pogson, a veteran of Operation Iraqi Freedom and a member of the VFW's Farmington-Plainville post.

"It's a moment, a huge moment, for self-reflection and to recognize and feel gratitude for the selfless service and sacrifice of these people, people of different beliefs and ideologies" she said.

Harry R. "Butch" Hansen Jr., the department adjutant for American Legion Connecticut, served in the military from 1981 to 2016, in conflicts including Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom. Hansen said: "It's important to make sure that military people are recognized.

"We give a lot and it goes for the most part unnoticed," Hansen, of Wolcott, said. "It's important to keep that memory alive as long as possible."

### **Flyovers**

Air Force Capt. Jennifer Pierce is the public affairs officer of the East Granby-based 103rd Airlift Wing, the only source for C-130 flyovers in Connecticut from the Connecticut Air National Guard. She said flyovers have been suspended.

"The decision to not fly in any holiday flyovers is made by the Secretary of the Air Force Public Affairs office. According to their current guidance, any holiday flyovers are not approved for any of the 50 states through June 30, 2020," she said. "This decision could change, however, we are required to follow Air Force guidance."

Helicopter flyovers are handled by the Army-affiliated Connecticut National Guard. Capt. Dave Pytlik, public affairs officer for that body, said a flyover took place in Connecticut on May 14 as part of the pandemic-initiated morale-boosting program Operation American Resolve. Pytlik added that no Army-approved flyovers will take place in the state after that event.

## **Poppies**

The American Legion Auxiliary, which coordinates poppy distributions, has encouraged veterans to stay safe this year. American Legion Auxiliary National President Nicole Clapp and American Legion National Commander James W. “Bill” Oxford released a joint statement:

“We understand it’s difficult this year for American Legion Family volunteers to distribute poppies as they normally would at storefronts and special events,” the statement read. “It’s important to know that the Legion and Auxiliary national organizations encourage distributions, but at the same time we also ask volunteers to heed local officials’ directives on social distancing.”

National Poppy Day is always the Friday before Memorial Day. The Legion suggested drive-by celebrations at American Legion posts on May 22, social-media sharing of American Legion videos and other safe alternatives. The Auxiliary National Headquarters also will present a virtual National Poppy Day event on May 22 at noon on [Facebook.com/alaforveterans](https://www.facebook.com/alaforveterans).

## **Car parades, virtual presentations**

Some towns are presenting scaled-down and socially distant commemorations.

**Bloomfield** town officials have organized a Car Parade of Veterans and First Responders on May 25. It will begin at Carmen Arace School at 10 a.m. Residents are invited to stand outside their homes to wave and cheer. The parade route will be posted at [bloomfieldct.gov](https://www.bloomfieldct.gov).

**Windsor** town officials will place flags on veterans’ graves and honor Windsor veterans who died in the past year. Those events will be made into a video, which also will include people reciting the Pledge of Allegiance and the Flanders Field and Gettysburg addresses. That video will be posted on the town’s website — [townofwindsorct.com/memorial-day](https://www.townofwindsorct.com/memorial-day) — and its social media pages.

**Rocky Hill** Chamber of Commerce is asking residents to contribute to a Virtual Memorial Day Video. Residents can upload videos, 10 seconds or shorter, of themselves thanking veterans and essential workers. Those videos can be uploaded at [www.rhchamber.org/parade](https://www.rhchamber.org/parade), and the video can be viewed starting May 25 at 10:30 a.m. on the town’s website and its YouTube page.

**New Britain** is trying to organize a small caravan of classic cars on May 30 to transport veterans between the various military monuments around the city. The plan is to begin at 2 p.m. at Willow Brook Park and drive past all 11 of the veterans’ memorials during the next hour and a half. It will publicize the route and will invite homeowners and tenants along the way to stand on their lawns or sidewalks to watch. They will be encouraged to wave flags as the veterans pass.

A pre-recorded Memorial Day ceremony with the **Simsbury** Veterans Memorial as a backdrop will be shown on Simsbury Cable TV (Xfinity channels 5 and 1084, or Frontier channel 6069) on May 25 at 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. Prior to those broadcasts, SCTV will provide vintage footage of previous Memorial Day parades at 7:30 a.m. and 4:30 pm.

In **Jewett City**, a few veterans will be at Fanning Park on Memorial Day starting at 9 a.m., decorating memorials with wreaths, doing a 21-gun salute and releasing white doves. “We’re going to keep it to a minimum of people. We’ll all be safely distanced,” said David Greene, the state commander of VFW.

Check your town’s website for more information about Memorial Day plans.

### **Visit graves, plant flags**

Ken McLellan, the commander of the Middletown Council of Veterans, said the easiest way to commemorate the fallen is to visit cemeteries, find military graves and tidy them up.

“I’ve been to a number of cemeteries and I’ve seen veterans’ graves that haven’t been tended in a long time. Perhaps they had no families, or the family has moved away,” said McLellan, who served in the Army from 1973 to 2006. “Take a few minutes to look around for a military marker or American flag and clean around the marker. If the cemetery allows, plant some flowers.

“Check for American flags on veteran’s graves. If they’re getting a little worn or ragged, please replace it,” he added. Small flags can be bought at many stores.

Pogson said seeing graves is a reality check for non-military visitors. “This is the physical result of that person’s decision-making,” she said. “We must visit their final resting places.”

### **Visit monuments**

A visit to monuments honoring soldiers, alone or with family, is a way to honor the dead. Most towns have their own: plaques, flagpoles, obelisks, fountains, etc. Larger monuments can be seen statewide.

Matt Warshauer, professor of history at Central Connecticut State University, is an expert on the Civil War. He said the state is full of memorials to the Civil War dead. Two center around Hartford’s most notable architecture: Soldiers and Sailors Memorial Arch in Bushnell Park and the state Capitol.

“While you can’t get inside at the present time, a walk around the outside reveals many Civil War tributes and monuments,” Warshauer said of the Capitol. “Few know it, but Connecticut’s capitol has more Civil War monuments and tributes than any other capitol in the nation. We have 19. Next closest is South Carolina, with 11.”

A list of those Capitol monuments can be found at [connecticuthistory.org/civil-war-monuments-and-memorials-in-and-around-the-state-capitol](https://connecticuthistory.org/civil-war-monuments-and-memorials-in-and-around-the-state-capitol).

A list of other Civil War monuments in the state can be found on the Connecticut Historical Society website: [chs.org/finding\\_aides/ransom/overview1.htm](https://chs.org/finding_aides/ransom/overview1.htm).

Hartford Preservation Alliance’s website lists monuments around the city to soldiers from many wars: [hartfordpreservation.org/monuments](https://hartfordpreservation.org/monuments).

### **Make donations**

Nothing will bring back the fallen. And it is not yet Veterans Day, which honors all military veterans, living and dead. But there's never a bad time to donate to or help raise money for one of many organizations that offer services and support to Connecticut's veterans.

Greene said many organizations are flooded with requests for help from veterans statewide, who are as affected by the coronavirus as anyone.

"Everyone's doing everything at home. Most organizations have service officers and they're getting so many calls. They're overwhelmed," he said.

In addition to money donations, veterans could use other kinds of help. "Many veterans are getting older. If you know someone in your neighborhood, offer to cut grass or help clean or landscape the yard," McLellan said.

"Remember the Fallen" virtual 21K charity run-walks are based in **Hartford, Bridgeport, New Haven, Fairfield, Waterbury and Stamford**. Runners can sign up at [thevirtualrunchallenge.com/virtual-race-event/2020-memorial-day-21k-virtual-running-event](https://thevirtualrunchallenge.com/virtual-race-event/2020-memorial-day-21k-virtual-running-event) to participate and raise money for a designated or default military charity. Runners can complete their 21Ks anytime between May 15 and June 30.

Here are some direct-donation possibilities:

American Legion Department of Connecticut: [ctlegion.org](https://ctlegion.org)

American Veterans Department of Connecticut: [amvetsct.org](https://amvetsct.org)

Disabled American Veterans Department of Connecticut: [disabledvetsct.org](https://disabledvetsct.org)

Veterans of Foreign Wars Department of Connecticut: [vfwct.org](https://vfwct.org)

Vietnam Veterans of America State Council: [vva.org/chapter/vva-ct-state-council-01](https://vva.org/chapter/vva-ct-state-council-01)