As the rain began to fall on a wet, yet beautiful, Memorial Day morning, a small crowd gathered at the gazebo near Holyoke Memorial Park to pay tribute to the service of the nation's veterans and to remember those who paid the ultimate sacrifice for their country.

Though it sprinkled through the program, the heavy rain that occurred later in the day held off long enough for the ceremony to run smoothly.

A Memorial Day prayer, given by Elton Oltjenbruns, opened the program, followed by Ella Stewart singing the The Star Spangled Banner. Stewart sang two more pieces during the ceremony, including Be Thou My Vision and God Bless the USA.

Placing of the memorial wreaths was done by Deane Anderson and José León. A sobering Memorial Honor Roll of those from Holyoke who lost their lives in combat, followed by a list of veterans who have died in the last seven years, was read by Terry Barth and Shirley Kadlec. A salute from the Honor Guard was then given.

Taps, played by Jack Wieland on trumpet, closed Monday morning's program.

Lest we forget...

As a pharmacist for the Army in World War II, Glen Elmer Stenson, Jr. joined fellow veterans at the opening of the World War II Memorial in Washington, D.C. In his speech at Holyoke's Memorial Day service, he emphasized the importance of these memorials in the effort to keep future generations from forgetting the sacrifices that have been made by those in the military.

"Did you know there is not one memorial to World War I veterans in Washington, D.C.?" he asked the crowd.

The tradition of Memorial Day in the United States, said Stenson, began in the years following the Civil War, to honor the thousands of lives that were lost. Yet, he added, memorial days around the world have been common since Biblical times.

On Memorial Day, he said, people often reflect on the sacrifices of those who served in World Wars I and II, Korea, Vietnam and even the Civil War. However, he said, we should not forget those who fought in the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812.

"Their government gave them no benefits for fighting these wars," he said, "because they did not have the money to give. But without these men, we would not have become the freest nation in the world."

Organizations like the American Legion and VFW, he went on to say, are also vital to the fight in protecting the benefits for future generations in the armed services.

Soldiers returning home after World War I never received the benefits they were promised when they signed up. When World War II started, it was these veterans who fought for Congress to come up with the GI Bill, so the same thing would not happen to World War II soldiers.

"The same thing happened in Vietnam," said Stenson. "World War II and Korea veterans fought to keep these same benefits for Vietnam soldiers. And now, the Vietnam vets are fighting for benefits for our men who are serving in Operation Freedom."

One way vets can prevent the government and society from forgetting about the importance of its armed forces, said Stenson, is to tell their stories. "You may not want to," he said, "but you need to tell your stories to your children and grandchildren to keep the memory alive for future

generations.”

Stenson closed his speech Monday morning with a reading of John McCrea’s “In Flanders Fields” and the iconic statement, “Lest we forget...”