

This Day in History... November 11, 1954

Veterans Day

On November 11, 1954, America first observed Veterans Day, previously known as Armistice Day. Initially a day set aside to honor the veterans of World War I, it was expanded in 1954 to pay tribute to all veterans.



In 1983, Ronald Reagan declared National Atomic Veterans Day. This day honored those who participated in nuclear tests between 1945 and 1962 or the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.



National K9 Veterans Day is celebrated on March 13 in honor of America's military working dogs.



The Department of Veterans Affairs (formerly the Veterans Administration) oversees planning for Veterans Day activities.

An armistice ended fighting in World War I on November 11, 1918. On the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month, the world's warring nations agreed to stop fighting. While this day marked the end of hostilities, the war was considered officially over on June 28, 1919, with the Treaty of Versailles.

On the first anniversary of the cessation of hostilities, President Woodrow Wilson declared November 11, 1919, would be Armistice Day. He said, "To us in America, the reflections of Armistice Day will be filled with solemn pride in the heroism of those who died in the country's service and with gratitude for the victory, both because of the thing from which it has freed us and because of the opportunity it has given America to show her sympathy with peace and justice in the councils of the nations."

Early Armistice Day commemorations included parades and public meetings and businesses were encouraged to close at 11 a.m. By 1926, twenty seven states had made Armistice Day a legal holiday. On June 4 of that year, Congress issued a resolution calling on officials "to display the flag of the United States on all Government buildings on November 11 and inviting the people of the United States to observe the day in schools and churches, or other suitable places, with appropriate ceremonies of friendly relations with all other peoples."

Then on May 13, 1938, Congress passed an act that officially made Armistice Day a legal holiday on November 11. The day was meant to honor World War I veterans and promote world peace.

However, by 1954, America had participated in two more conflicts – World War II and the Korean War. Veterans organizations began writing to Congress, asking for the 1938 act to be altered to honor all veterans. World War II veteran Raymond Weeks, considered by some to be the "Father of Veterans Day," believed that Armistice Day could be expanded to honor all veterans. He submitted his idea to President Dwight D. Eisenhower, who supported it. Weeks organized America's first Veterans Day celebration in Birmingham, Alabama in 1947. He became one of the most vocal champions of the national holiday and was later awarded a Presidential Citizenship Medal for his efforts.

On June 1, 1954, the act was amended, and armistice was replaced with veterans. That October, President Dwight D. Eisenhower issued the first Veterans Day Proclamation, which read, "In order to insure proper and widespread observance of this anniversary, all veterans, all veterans' organizations, and the entire citizenry will wish to join hands in the common purpose. Toward this end, I am designating the Administrator of Veterans' Affairs as Chairman of a Veterans Day National Committee, which shall include such other persons as the Chairman may select, and which will coordinate at the national level necessary planning for the observance. I am also requesting the heads of all departments and agencies of the Executive branch of the Government to assist the National Committee in every way possible."

In 1968, Congress passed the Uniform Holiday Bill, which moved four national holidays to Mondays, so that people could have long weekends, encouraging travel. These holidays were Washington's Birthday, Memorial Day, Veterans Day, and Columbus Day. Many opposed the change to Veterans Day as the date was so significant to its history. October 25, 1971, was the first Veterans Day under this new law, though many communities continued to celebrate on November 11. The public's dissatisfaction with the change eventually led President Gerald R. Ford to reverse the change, moving Veterans Day back to November 11 starting in 1978.

In 2016, Congress passed the Veterans Day Moment of Silence Act, which calls for two minutes of silence on Veterans Day. It is usually observed at 2:11 p.m. EST, so that all 50 states and Puerto Rico can participate at the same time.



Veterans Day honors all Americans who honorably served our country, while Memorial Day honors those who died in service.



Veterans Day (without an apostrophe) is the correct spelling according to the US Department of Veterans Affairs, "because it is not a day that 'belongs' to veterans, it is a day for honoring all veterans."



New York City's Veterans Day Parade is both the largest and oldest, first held in 1919.

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