

Honoring Our Veterans

On the 11th hour,
of the 11th day,
of the 11th month

in 1918, an armistice, or agreement to stop fighting, was reached between the Allied nations and Germany in World War I.

One year later, President Woodrow Wilson declared that Nov. 11, 1919 was a day to remember Americans for their military service in World War I. He called it Armistice Day. He suggested that Americans celebrate with parades and perhaps a “brief suspension of business” around 11 a.m. President Wilson also hoped it would be a time when Americans offered prayers of thanksgiving for those who had served and for peace for all times.

★ President Wilson originally intended Armistice Day to be observed one time, but many states decided to observe it every year to honor World War I veterans.

★ Congress followed the states’ lead and in 1938 declared that every November 11 would be observed as Armistice Day.

★ Congress changed the name to Veterans Day in 1954 to honor veterans of all wars.

★ For a brief time, 1971-1974, Veterans Day was observed on the 4th Monday in October. Since 1975, Veterans Day is always observed on Nov. 11.

★ If Nov. 11 falls on a Saturday or Sunday, the federal government observes the holiday on the previous Friday or following Monday, respectively.

★ Nov. 11, 1921, when the first of the unknown soldiers was buried in Arlington National Cemetery, unidentified soldiers also were laid to rest at Westminster Abbey in London and at the Arc de Triomphe in Paris.

★ Memorial Day, the fourth Monday in May, honors American service members who died in service to their country.



★ Veterans Day pays tribute to all American veterans, living or dead, but especially gives thanks to living veterans who served their country honorably during war or peacetime.

★ States designate their own holidays, so there are no official U.S. national holidays. The government can only designate holidays for federal employees and for the District of Columbia. But states almost always follow the federal lead.

Timeline for Veterans Day Observance

- Nov. 11, 1918** The fighting in World War I ended. (The Treaty of Versailles formally ended the war on June 28, 1919)
- November 1919** President Woodrow Wilson proclaimed that Nov. 11, 1919, would be observed as Armistice Day—a day to honor the veterans of World War I.
- Nov. 11, 1921** The first of the unknown soldiers, a veteran of World War I, was buried in Arlington Cemetery in Virginia in what has become known as the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. On the same day, unidentified soldiers were laid to rest at Westminster Abbey in London and at the Arc de Triomphe in Paris.
- June 4, 1926** Twenty-seven states had made Armistice Day a holiday so Congress declared it to be a recurring day of remembrance.
- May 13, 1938** Congress makes Armistice Day a national holiday.
- June 28, 1968** Congress changed Veterans Day to the fourth Monday in October.
- Sept. 20, 1975** President Gerald Ford changed Veterans Day back to Nov. 11.



Activities

1. Write to local citizens who are serving in the military and to the newspaper publicly thanking those in military service.
2. Learn more about The Tomb of the Unknowns at www.arlingtoncemetery.mil/visitorinformation/TombofUnknowns.aspx
3. Research the Uniform Holiday Bill. Why were people unhappy with this bill?

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