

Why did Veterans Day start?

By Department of Veterans Affairs, adapted by Newsela staff on 11.11.16

Word Count **615**



Members of the U.S. Navy march with the American flag in the nation's largest Veterans Day Parade in New York City, November 11, 2015. Known as "America's Parade," it features more than 20,000 participants, including veterans of military units, high school bands and civic and youth groups. Photo: Getty Images.

History Of Veterans Day

World War I officially ended on June 28, 1919. At the time, it was called "The Great War." It was fought between many of the countries of the world. On that day in June, Germany and the Allied nations — England, France, the United States and Italy — signed a peace treaty in France. It was called the Treaty of Versailles because it was signed in the Palace of Versailles.

The actual fighting ended seven months earlier. An armistice, or truce, went into effect on the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month. For that reason, November 11, 1918, is generally considered the end of World War I.

In 1919, President Woodrow Wilson proclaimed November 11th to be Armistice Day. It "will be filled with solemn pride in the heroism of those who died in the country's service," he said.

President Wilson said Armistice Day should be celebrated because the U.S. won the war. It would also let the U.S. show its love of peace and justice. People should celebrate with parades and public events.

Congress officially recognized Armistice Day on June 4, 1926. It passed a law stating that November 11, 1918, should be marked as the end of the largest and most destructive war in human history.

Lawmakers said the U.S. flag should be flown on all government buildings. It also asked U.S. citizens to observe the day.

It was not until 1938 that November 11th became a legal holiday. Schools and government offices were closed. The day was supposed to be dedicated to world peace. At first, it mainly honored veterans of World War I. In 1941, the United States entered World War II, another global battle. In 1950, American forces fought in the Korean War. Veterans groups began asking Congress to honor all soldiers. In 1954, Congress changed the 1938 law. It replaced "Armistice" with the word "Veterans." November 11th became a day to honor American veterans of all wars.

What Is The Difference Between Veterans Day And Memorial Day?

Many people confuse Memorial Day and Veterans Day. On Memorial Day, the U.S. remembers and honors soldiers who died for their country. Veterans Day is to thank everyone who served in the military — in wartime or peacetime. In fact, Veterans Day is mainly intended to show appreciation to living veterans for their service. It also emphasizes that all soldiers have done their duty to the country.

Is Veterans Day Celebrated In Other Countries?

Yes, many countries honor their veterans each year on November 11th. Many of them do it somewhat differently. For example, Canada and Australia observe "Remembrance Day" on November 11th. Great Britain observes Remembrance Day on the Sunday nearest to November 11th. Canada's Remembrance Day is very similar to the U.S. celebration. The day honors everyone who served in Canada's armed forces.

In Canada, people wear red poppy flowers on November 11th to honor soldiers who died in war. The tradition began with the World War I poem "In Flanders Fields." It was written by Colonel John McCrae, a Canadian doctor. His poem expressed his sadness at seeing the graves of soldiers. Flanders is an area in western Belgium and northern France. McCrae described the bright red poppy flowers blooming in the graveyards. Americans traditionally wear poppies on Memorial Day, not Veterans Day. In Australia, Remembrance Day is very much like America's Memorial Day.

In Great Britain, the day is celebrated with church services and parades of ex-soldiers. Wreaths of poppies are left at a war memorial in London. In England, people are silent for two minutes at 11 a.m., November 11th. The moment of silence honors those who lost their lives in wars.