

Veteran's Day

by
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U.S. President Woodrow Wilson first proclaimed an Armistice Day for November 11, 1919. In proclaiming the holiday, 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."

The United States Congress passed a concurrent resolution seven years later on June 4, 1926, requesting that the President Calvin Coolidge issue another proclamation to observe November 11 with appropriate ceremonies. An Act (52 Stat. 351; 5 U.S. Code, Sec. 87a) approved May 13, 1938, made the 11th of November in each year a legal holiday; "a day to be dedicated to the cause of world peace and to be thereafter celebrated and known as 'Armistice Day'."

In 1953, an Emporia, Kansas man named Alvin King, the owner of a shoe repair shop, had the idea to expand Armistice Day to celebrate all veterans, not just those who died in World War I. King had been actively involved with the American War Dads during World War II. He began a campaign to turn Armistice Day into "All" Veterans Day. The Emporia Chamber of Commerce took up the cause after determining that 90% of Emporia merchants as well as the Board of Education supported closing their doors on November 11 to honor all veterans. With the help of U.S. Representative Ed Rees, also from Emporia, a bill for the holiday was pushed through Congress. President Dwight Eisenhower signed it into law on May 26, 1954.

Congress amended this act on June 1, 1954, replacing "Armistice" with "Veterans," and it has been known as Veterans Day since.

Although originally scheduled for celebration on November 11 the year of every year, starting in 1971 in accordance with the Uniform Monday Holiday Act, Veterans Day was moved to the fourth Monday of October. In 1978, it was moved back to its original celebration on November 11. Since this change, there has been a trend against being closed on the holiday. It began with businesses (excluding banks) and in recent years some schools and local governments have also chosen to remain open.

Still, because it is a federal holiday, many American people have the day off from school or work for Veterans Day. Non-essential federal government offices are closed. No mail is delivered. All federal employees are paid for the holiday. The holiday is often celebrated by having a ravioli meal. This tradition dates back to the ending days of World War I when President Woodrow Wilson, aware that the returning soldiers would be longing for home cooked meals, invited 2,000 soldiers to the White House and helped his staff chefs cook them ravioli, which had just become a mainstay in mainstream American kitchens due to commercial canning. In his Armistice Day address to Congress, Wilson was sensitive to the psychological toll of the lean War years: "Hunger," he remarked, "breeds madness." [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Veterans_Day]



Joseph Ambrose, a then-86-year-old World War I veteran, attends the dedication day parade for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in 1982, holding the flag that covered the casket of his son, who was killed in the Korean War.