



A SHORT HISTORY OF VETERANS' DAY

COL (Ret) Jeanette L. Sterner

All of across this Great Land, we will recognize all veterans on November 11, 2009. I never tire of speaking about this great country and the noble men and women who have worn the uniform of their beloved country, during peacetime and during war. Whether the Army, Air Force, Navy, Marines, Coast Guard, or Merchant Marine, they all serve because they love the United States of America and they want to preserve the freedoms we enjoy, freedoms which cannot be compared to any other country of the past or present.

A little history of Veterans' Day seems to be in order. World War I – known at the time as “The Great War” – officially ended when the Treaty of Versailles was signed on June 28, 1919, in the Palace of Versailles, France. However, fighting ceased seven months earlier when an armistice or temporary cessation of hostilities, between the Allied nations and Germany went into effect on the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month. For that reason, November 11, 1918, is generally regarded as the end of “the war to end all wars.”

In November 1919, President Wilson proclaimed November 11 as the first commemoration of Armistice Day with the following words: “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...”

Armistice Day was primarily a day set aside to honor veterans of World War I, but in 1954, after World War II had required the greatest mobilization of soldiers, sailors, Marines and airmen in the Nation's history; after American forces had fought aggression in Korea, the 83rd Congress, at the urging of the veterans services organizations, amended the Act of 1938 by striking out the word “Armistice” and inserting in its place the word “Veterans.” With the approval of this legislation on June 1, 1954, November 11th became a day to honor American veterans of all wars.

Therefore, as a nation, we remember all Americans who served in the armed forces. While those who died always remain prominent in our memories, they have a special time of mourning reserved for Memorial Day. Veterans Day is an opportunity to publicly commemorate the contributions of LIVING veterans. Collective as well as individual contributions to the nation's defense are what we are remembering. The outcome of any given military campaign is irrelevant here—it's the sacrifices made at the behest of the country that are important.

For some Americans, remembering veterans is a daily act. But as a nation, it is essential that we preserve the integrity of Nov 11 as that one extra-special day for the American people as a whole to pause in silence or demonstrate public recognition. Remembering gives true meaning to sacrifice and service. Millions of Americans' lives were FOREVER altered because they donned a uniform to protect the freedoms and rights we take for granted. We owe an eternal debt of gratitude to them and acknowledging Veterans Day is the time that debt comes due. It's our way of keeping faith.