

Veterans Day 2017

Each year on 11 November, we honor our military men and women who serve and those who served to protect our country. Our Veterans come from all walks of life, parents, children, grandparents, friends, neighbors and coworkers. Some of us are more vocal about our service than others, but we are all proud to serve our country. At the end of World War I, also known as the war to end all wars, Germany signed an armistice agreement with the Allies in a railroad car outside Compiègne, France. The signing occurred at the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month of 1918. The Treaty of Versailles wasn't signed until 28 June 1919 formally ending the war. Ever since, we have celebrated on 11 November, but it wasn't until 1926 that legislation was passed officially observing 11 November as Armistice Day. It became a national holiday in 1938. In 1954 President Eisenhower officially changed the name of the holiday to Veterans Day. In 1968, the Uniform Holidays Bill was passed by Congress moving Veterans Day to the fourth Monday in October, going into effect in 1971. That lasted only until 1975 when Navy Veteran Gerald Ford returned Veterans Day to 11 November. It is common to observe two minutes of silence at 11:00am on Veterans Day. Interestingly, Australia, Canada, France and Great Britain celebrate Veterans Day on or near 11 November.

We currently have about 16.1 million living Veterans who served during at least one war with an additional 5.2 who served during peacetime. About 2 million Veterans are women. As of 2014, almost 3 million Veterans received compensation for service-connected disabilities. California, Florida and Texas have the most living Veterans. Of the 16 million Americans who served during WWII, about 500,000 are still alive.

Our Nation has an interesting history of taking care of our Veterans, going back to 1636, when the Pilgrims of Plymouth Colony were at war with the Pequot Indians. That Pilgrims passed a law stating that disabled soldiers would be supported by the colony. The Continental Congress of 1776 encouraged enlistments by providing pensions to disabled soldiers. In 1811, the US authorized the first Veterans' home and medical facility. Also in the 19th century, assistance was expanded to provide for widows and dependents. Following the Civil War, care was provided to Veterans not only by the federal government but by many states. Following WWI, three separate agencies of the federal government were charged with providing care to Veterans. President Hoover, by executive order, combined all Veterans care into the Veterans Administration to "consolidate and coordinate Government activities affecting war veterans". Following WWII, one of the best programs for Veterans was signed into law – the G.I. Bill, providing education and home loan benefits. One of the most notable VA directors was General Omar Bradley. I found this quote from him very appropriate "Ours is a world of nuclear giants and ethical infants. We know more about war than we know about peace, more about killing than we know about living."