



Tarrant County Veterans Council

FACT SHEET

Saluting Our Nation... 250 Years of Veterans in Service

Armistice Day History

Armistice Day is commemorated every year on November 11 to mark the armistice signed between the Allies of World War I and Germany at Compiegne, France at 5:45 a.m. for the cessation of hostilities on the Western Front of World War I, which took effect at eleven o'clock in the morning – the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month of 1918.

But, according to Thomas Gowenlock, an intelligence officer with the US First Division, shelling from both sides continued for the rest of the day, only ending at nightfall. The armistice initially expired after a period of 36 days and had to be extended several times. A formal peace agreement was only reached when the Treaty of Versailles was signed the following year.

The date is a national holiday in France and was declared a national holiday in many Allied nations. During World War II, many countries changed the name of the holiday. Member states of the Commonwealth of Nations adopted Remembrance Day, while the US chose Veterans Day. In some countries Armistice Day coincides with other public holidays.

The first Armistice Day was held at Buckingham Palace, commencing with King George V, hosting a Banquet in Honour of the President of the French Republic during the evening hours of Nov. 10, 1919. The first official Armistice Day events were subsequently held in the grounds of Buckingham Palace on the morning of Nov. 11, 1919, which included a two-minute silence as a mark of respect for those who died in the war and those left behind. This would set the trend for a day of remembrance for decades to come.

Similar ceremonies developed in other countries during the inter-war period. In South Africa, for example, the Memorable Order of Tin Hats had developed by the late 1920s a ceremony whereby the toast of Fallen Comrades was observed not only in silence but darkness, all except for the Light of Remembrance, with the ceremony ending with the Order's anthem Old Soldiers Never Die.

In Britain, beginning in 1939, the two-minute silence was moved to the Sunday nearest to November 11 in order not to interfere with wartime production should November 11 fall on a weekday. This became Remembrance Sunday.

After the end of World War II, most member states of the Commonwealth of Nations, like the United Kingdom and (as Canada had in 1931), adopted the name Remembrance Day.

Other countries also changed the name of the holiday just prior to or after World War II, to honor veterans of that and subsequent conflicts. The United States chose All Veterans Day, later shortened to Veterans Day, to explicitly honor military veterans, including those participating in other conflicts.

In the United Kingdom and Commonwealth countries, both Remembrance Day and Remembrance Sunday are commemorated formally but are not public holidays. The National Service of Remembrance is held in London on Remembrance Sunday. In the United States, Veterans Day honors American veterans, both living and dead.

The official national remembrance of those killed in action is Memorial Day, which predates World War I. Some, including American novelist Kurt Vonnegut and American Veteran for Peace Rory Fanning, have urged Americans to resume observation of November 11 as Armistice Day, a day to reflect on how we can achieve peace as it was originally observed.

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