



## Veterans Affairs

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Director

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# THE ORIGINS OF VETERANS DAY

In 1921, an unknown World War I American soldier was buried at Arlington National Cemetery. This site, on a hillside overlooking the Potomac River and the city of Washington D.C., became the focal point of reverence for America's veterans.

Similar ceremonies occurred earlier in England and France, where an unknown soldier was buried in each nation's highest place of honor (in England, Westminster Abbey; in France, the Arc de Triumf). These memorial gestures all took place on November 11th, giving universal recognition to the celebrated ending of World War I fighting at 11 a.m., November 11, 1918 (the 11th hour of the 11<sup>th</sup> day of the 11th month). The day became known as "Armistice Day". Armistice Day officially received its name in America in 1926 through a Congressional Resolution. It became a national holiday 12 years later by similar Congressional action.



### Armistice Day Changed to Veterans Day

In 1954 President Eisenhower signed a bill proclaiming November 11 as **Veterans Day** to honor American veterans from all of her wars. On Memorial Day 1958, two more unidentified American war dead were brought from overseas and interred in the plaza beside the unknown soldier of World War I. One was killed in World War II, the other in the Korean War. In 1973, a law passed providing interment of an unknown American from the Vietnam War, but none was found for several years. In 1984, an unknown serviceman from that conflict was placed alongside the others. To honor these men, symbolic of all Americans who gave their lives in all wars, an Army honor guard, The 3rd U.S. Infantry (The Old Guard), keeps day and night vigil.

A law passed in 1968 changed the national commemoration of Veterans Day to the fourth Monday in October. It soon became apparent, however, that November 11 was a date of historic significance to many Americans. Therefore, in 1978 Congress returned the observance to its traditional date.

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