



.....**STRAIGHT FROM THE HORSES MOUTH**

Duane A. Lienemann, UNL Extension Educator, Webster County

November 6, 2015 Edition

When we think of November holidays, chances are Thanksgiving comes to mind first. But the first November holiday we celebrate in America is actually a day to give thanks to the men and women who have served in the military. As I write this I make note that Veterans Day will fall on the middle of the week. Most federal workers are given the day off and there is no mail service on this day. I think it is good to give pause to think about why we celebrate this day and as is my nature, I wanted to find out a little more about the holiday and what we celebrate on Veterans Day? To be sure, we mean to honor the brave men and women, living and dead, who have fought America's battles, past and present. But honor them how, and for what? Let's take a look at this special day at the history behind the celebration and why it is important to us.

Many Americans mistakenly believe that Veterans Day is the day America sets aside to honor American military personnel who died in battle or as a result of wounds sustained from combat. That's not quite true. Memorial Day is the day set aside to honor America's war dead. Veterans Day, on the other hand, honors all American veterans, both living and dead. In fact, Veterans Day is largely intended to thank living veterans for dedicated and loyal service to their country. November 11 of each year is the day that we ensure that veterans know that we deeply appreciate the sacrifices they have made with their blood and their lives to keep our country free. I think sometimes we forget these patriots and contributions.

To commemorate the ending of the "Great War" (World War I), an "unknown soldier" was buried in highest place of honor in both England and France (in England, Westminster Abbey; in France, the Arc de Triomphe). These ceremonies took place on November 11th, celebrating the ending of World War I hostilities at 11 a.m., November 11, 1918 (the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month). This day became known internationally as "Armistice Day". In 1921, the United States of America followed France and England by laying to rest the remains of a World War I American soldier -- his name "known but to God" -- on a Virginia hillside overlooking the city of Washington DC and the Potomac River. This site became known as the "Tomb of the Unknown Soldier," and today is called the "Tomb of the Unknowns." Located in Arlington National Cemetery, the tomb symbolizes dignity and reverence for the American veteran. I have had the opportunity to visit this memorial a couple of times and witness the somber ceremony. It is an incredible experience. In America, November 11th officially became known as Armistice Day through an act of Congress in 1926. It wasn't until 12 years later, through a similar act that Armistice Day became a national holiday.

The entire World thought that World War I was the "War to end all wars." Had this been true, the holiday might still be called Armistice Day today. That dream was shattered in 1939 when World War II broke out in Europe. More than 400,000 American service members died during that horrific war. In 1947, Raymond Weeks, of Birmingham Ala., organized a "Veterans Day" parade on November 11th to honor all of America's veterans for their loyal and dedicated service. Shortly thereafter, Congressman Edward H. Rees (Kansas) introduced legislation to change the name of Armistice Day to Veterans Day in order to honor all veterans who have served the United States in all wars. Both of my grandfathers were in this war.

In 1954, President Eisenhower signed a bill proclaiming November 11 as Veterans Day, and called upon Americans everywhere to rededicate themselves to the cause of peace. He issued a Presidential Order directing the head of the Veterans Administration (now called the Department of Veterans Affairs), to form a Veterans Day National Committee to organize and oversee the national observance of Veterans Day. Congress passed legislation in 1968 to move Veterans Day to the fourth Monday in October. However, as it became apparent that November 11th was historically significant to many Americans, in 1978, Congress reversed itself and returned the holiday to its traditional date.

Veterans Day is now always observed on November 11, regardless of the day of the week on which it falls. The observance of Veterans Day not only preserves the historical significance of the date, but helps focus attention on the important purpose of Veterans Day: A celebration to honor America's veterans for their patriotism, love of country, and willingness to serve and sacrifice for the common good. As we get prepared for Thanksgiving Day where we celebrate all the bounty we have, we need to remember Veterans Day which precedes that day as it our way of saying thank you to those that made it possible for us to have all of the things that we are thankful for -- including, not only that bounty but our freedom. They fought and died for the things that we sometimes take for granted. We should honor them for their service!

Veterans Day should be a very important day. It should remind us to be thankful to those who have served our country and those who still do. It is very important to recognize those who fallen in all wars for our country. If it were not for them it is very possible we would not be the great nation we are today. So please take a few moments this November 11th, at 11am - in remembrance of those who have fallen serving our country. I will stop whatever I am doing and offer up a silent prayer to honor my grandfathers who both served in WWI; my father and father in law who both served in WWII; and all of my other relatives, friends, and all others who served our country in war and peace from the American Revolution that started this country to the violent places where we defend it today. Be sure that you too offer a prayer and thank those veterans who served our country and have given so much for our nation. To all of our heroes who've served our country, we thank you and honor you all this Veteran's Day. Thank you for all your sacrifices and for fighting for our freedom!

The preceding information comes from the research and personal observations of the writer which may or may not reflect the views of UNL or UNL Extension. For more further information on these or other topics contact D. A. Lienemann, UNL Extension Educator for Webster County in Red Cloud, (402) 746-3417 or email to: dlienemann2@unl.edu or go to the website at: <http://www.webster.unl.edu/home>