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At 11 a.m. on November 11, 1918 the guns were silenced on the Western Front and the War to end all Wars came to halt. The armistice that ended the fighting was only a temporary measure and real peace had to wait for the signing of the infamous Treaty of Versailles in 1919. World War I had been an unimaginable conflict and was alternately referred to as the Great War or the War to end all Wars. For Americans it was beyond belief that they had gone against President Washington's advice not embroil the country in old world affairs. Many Americans assumed that U.S. participation in the war would be limited to military and economic assistance and were surprised when American troops entered combat. These troops included blacks and native Americans. Moreover, before the war ended, some 25,000 American women arrived in France where these volunteers served as nurses, ambulance drivers, social workers, Red Cross workers, and, a handful, as contract surgeons of the U.S. army. On the home front sacrifices were made as well. It was therefore understandable that Americans were ecstatic when President Wilson issued the proclamation of the Armistice on November 11, 1918 in which he stated:

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.

The anniversary of the armistice was originally celebrated by suspending business for a two minute period starting at 11 a.m. Some localities also held parades and or public meetings. Later in 1920 President Wilson named the Sunday closest to November 11 Armistice Day Sunday and advocated that services to be held on this day in the interest of international peace. More needed to be done to pay homage to those who served in the War, and on March 4, 1921 Congress passed a resolution which provided for the burial of an unidentified American World War I soldier in the Memorial Amphitheater at Arlington National Cemetery on November 11, 1921. Annual Armistice/Veterans Day ceremonies at the Memorial Amphitheater, home of the tomb of the unknowns have been presided over by every president since President Harding.

On October 20, a few weeks prior to the ceremony at Arlington National Cemetery, Congress declared November 11, 1921 a legal Federal holiday to honor all those who participated in the war. Veteran observances had been held since 1919, however, it was not until 1926 that Congress adopted a resolution which directed the president to issue an annual proclamation on the observance of Armistice Day. In the 1920s and 1930s the majority of states also established November 11 as a legal holiday. In 1938 Congress enacted legislation in which it designated November 11, Armistice Day, as a legal Federal holiday. America's participation in World War II and Korea created millions of additional war veterans which led Congress to enact legislation (HR7786) changing the name from Armistice Day to Veteran's Day. President Eisenhower, himself a World War II veteran, signed the legislation into law on June 1, 1954.

The holiday continued to be observed on November 11 to delight of old and young alike. Tradition was dealt a blow in 1968 when Congress enacted the Uniform Holiday Bill, Public

Law 90-363 (82 Stat. 250), which was intended to ensure three-day weekends for Federal employees by celebrating four national holidays on Mondays: Washington's Birthday, Memorial Day, Veterans Day, and Columbus Day. As a result of this legislation the fourth Monday in October was set as the new date for the observance of Veteran's Day.

Needless to say, the first Veteran's Day under the new law "was observed with much confusion on October 25, 1971." The change of dates did not have popular support. Indeed, it went against the desires of the overwhelming majority of state legislatures, all major veterans service organizations and the American people. The governments of 46 states either stayed with or quickly returned November 11 to commemorate Veterans Day. The fact was that November 11 had historic and patriotic significance to a large number of people. Congress yielded to popular sentiment and Public Law 94-97 (89 Stat. 479) which returned the annual observance of Veterans Day to its original date of November 11, beginning in 1978. President Ford signed the Act into law on September 20, 1975.

Since 1978 Veterans Day has continued to be observed on November 11, regardless of the day of the week it falls on. When Congress restored the observance of Veterans Day to November 11 it preserved the historical significance of the date. Equally important, it helped to focus attention on the 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.





President Eisenhower signing legislation on June 1, 1954 to change the name from Armistice Day to Veterans Day