



*The Origins of Veterans Day  
Fact Sheet*

**VA Medical Center's 2003 Veterans Day Parade**

In 1921, an unknown World War I American soldier was buried in Arlington National Cemetery. This site, on a hillside overlooking the Potomac River and the city of Washington, 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 Triomphe). 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 11th, 1918 (the 11<sup>th</sup> hour of the 11<sup>th</sup> day of the 11<sup>th</sup> 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. If the idealistic hope had been realized that World War I was "the War to end all wars," November 11th might still be called Armistice Day, but only a few years after the holiday was proclaimed, war broke out in Europe. Sixteen and one-half million Americans took part. Four hundred seven thousand of them died in service, more than 292,000 in battle.

An answer to the question of how to pay tribute to those who served in this latest, great war came in a proposal made by Representative Edwin K. Rees of Kansas: Change Armistice Day to Veterans Day, and make it an occasion to honor those who served America in all wars. In 1954, President Eisenhower signed a bill proclaiming November 11th as Veterans Day.