

Restoring Veterans Day

Remembering America's warriors is often an afterthought for many Americans, and it's about time Nov. 11 is paid its proper respect

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Veterans Day, once a widely celebrated holiday, is increasingly forgotten by many Americans. One need only look at the poor turnouts at ceremonies on Nov. 11. With the percentage of citizens who have worn a uniform rapidly declining, appreciation for the sacrifices made by veterans is correspondingly diminishing.

To help counter this trend, VFW has long promoted Veterans Day as an opportunity to educate the public as to the meaning of this significant time each November. This task can best be accomplished by explaining the five “Ws.”

Who. As a nation, we remember all Americans who served on active duty in the armed forces. While those who died always remain prominent in our memories, they have a special time of mourning reserved for Memorial Day. Veterans Day is an opportunity to publicly commemorate the contributions of living veterans.

What. Collective as well as individual contributions to the nation’s defense is what we are remembering. The outcome of any given military campaign is irrelevant here—it’s the sacrifices made at the behest of the country that are important.

Where. Across the land, the grounds of virtually every state capital and county courthouse host monuments, memorials and plaques honoring those who served. They date back as far as the American Revolution and are as recent as Iraq. But paying homage to veterans need not necessarily be in a public place. Every private home also should serve this purpose when appropriate.

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When. For some Americans, remembering veterans is a daily act. But as a nation, it is essential that we preserve the integrity of November 11 as that one extra-special day for the American people as a whole to pause in private or demonstrate recognition in public.

Why. Remembering gives true meaning to sacrifice and service. Millions of Americans' lives were forever altered because they donned a uniform to protect the freedoms and rights we take for granted. We owe an eternal debt of gratitude to them. And acknowledging Veterans Day is the time that debt comes due. It's our way of keeping faith with former defenders.

The 23.8 million veterans living today deserve the recognition. It is often forgotten that legislative battles were waged over this day and its earlier version called Armistice Day in 1926, 1938, 1954 and throughout the 1970s. Let's not take its value for granted.

One final thought. This year is an especially poignant time to restore Veterans Day to its rightful place in society.

Though the war in Iraq is far from over, we reached a significant milestone with the end of offensive U.S. operations there. Put simply, the Americans in uniform did the job asked of them, and the 50,000 who remain behind will continue to do so.

Veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan have fully joined the cavalcade of America's veterans, VFW generations who span WWI to the present day.