

Thanks to our Veterans Every War Has an End: Upholding Veterans Day

An Editorial by VFW National Commander Glen Gardner

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

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.

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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 are 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 capitol 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 the Iraq War. But paying homage to veterans need not necessarily be in a public place. Every private home also should serve this purpose when appropriate.

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

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.

All of this is particularly relevant now,

with the nation at war in Afghanistan and Iraq. Nearly 4,800 Americans have been killed in the two war zones to date. Approximately 1.7 million tours have been logged so far with 600,000 individuals having served there. About 325,000 of them have used VA benefits and services. Many, present as well as past, have displayed exceptional courage on the battlefield, as this month's issue clearly illustrates.

The 23.8 million veterans living in America 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.

Glen Gardner Glen Gardner was elected Commander-in-Chief of the Veterans of Foreign Wars Aug. 21, 2008, at the VFW 109th national convention, held in Orlando, Fla.

A former Marine, Gardner served as an aircraft mechanic with the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing, Marine Aircraft Group 12 in Chu Lai, Vietnam from 1968-1969. He was awarded the Combat Action Ribbon, Vietnam Service Medal, Good Conduct Medal, the National Defense Service Medal, Vietnam Campaign Medal with device and the Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry.

A resident of Round Rock, Texas, Gardner has been involved with the VFW for nearly 30 years, first as a member of VFW Post 2993 in Olathe, Kan., and later, a member of Post 3359 in Garland, Texas. He has

held numerous VFW officer positions, including adjutant/quartermaster for the Department of Texas. He also was instrumental in forming the Texas Coalition of Veterans Organizations, chairing the 600,000-member group for 15 years.