

Honoring Our Heroes
Veterans Day
By
Toby A. Echelberry

Growing up in our home, November 11th always had two celebrations. The first it was my sister's birthday, and the other was this day is Veterans Day, a day we honor all those who served in the United States Armed Forces, which was something several in our family had done to include my father and myself. A question for all, do you know the history of this honored day and why we celebrate it?

With the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars in the late 1700s most of Europe had fallen under one rule, the French Empire. After the Napoleonic Wars a new political movement was growing rapidly, nationalism. Consolidation of powers spread throughout Europe as nation-states of Germany and Italy quickly gained power. Several smaller states and fiefdoms consolidated to make small countries such as Denmark, Sweden, and Norway. In 1814 a series of international diplomatic meetings were held to discuss a new European political system under constitutional order called the Congress of Vienna. The purpose of the Congress of Vienna was to provide long-term peace in Europe and resize the main powers, setting a balance of power.

In 1848 Britain decided to step aside and avoided any permanent alliances. Along with this the next few decades saw decline of the Ottoman Empire as well as the rise of Prussia under the leadership of Otto von Bismark. In 1870 through 1871, Bismark grew in power after the Franco-Prussian war where Bismark consolidated a German Empire. In 1873 Bismark negotiated the League of Three Emperors (alliance of German, Russian and Austro-Hungarian empires but was dissolved after the 1877-1878 Russo-Turkish War and concerns of Russian influence over the Balkans. In 1882 a Triple Alliance was established when Germany, Austria-Hungary and Italy created an alliance with one another.

The growing tensions reached a breaking point on June 28, 1914, when Gavrilo Princip assassinated Archduke Franz Ferdinand the heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne. Austria-Hungary held Serbia responsible for the assassination and on July 28, 1914, declared war. Russia mobilized its military and created a defense for Serbia. Within a week Germany, Russia, France, and the United Kingdom were drawn into the war with the Ottoman Empire joining in November, thus creating the war to end all wars. In April 1917, the United States was pulled into the global war because of submarine warfare being caused by Germany.

A successful Allied counter-offensive in the summer of 1918 overpowered the German front lines. A few months later Bulgaria, the Ottoman Empire and Austria-Hungary signed peace treaties leaving Germany as the lone Central power. In what was known as the November Revolution, German workers and soldiers created an uprising and on November 9, Kaiser Wilhelm II finally abdicated and the Great War was officially over on November 11, 1918.

World War I was one of the deadliest conflicts where forty million souls were lost combined with civilian and military. For the United States, the total losses were 117,466 where the total of Allied forces was between 9,235,553 to 10,080,391 with the most being from Russia who lost 2,840,000 to 3,394,369.

A year later several Allied countries marked the day as Armistice Day and celebrated it. In the United Kingdom, King George V held a Banquet in Honor of the President of French Republic held at Buckingham Palace which included a two-minute of silence tribute on the eleventh hour. For France, they would not celebrate it until the following year, Belgium celebrated this day on August 4th until 1922. For the United States, President Woodrow Wilson addressed the nation focusing on the victory brought political freedoms and how when great nations come together for high purposes, victory will endure. He also went on to reflect on how we should remember this day with immense pride in the heroism of those who gave the ultimate sacrifice. In 1926, the United States Congress requested an adopted resolution to be signed by President Calvin Coolidge to mark this day annually with observation and appropriate ceremonies. In 1938, Congress adopted a bill to make this a federal holiday titled Armistice Day.

In 1954, President Dwight D. Eisenhower signed a another bill to change the wording from Armistice Day to Veterans Day after World War II and Korea to mark November 11th as a day to remember not only for those who gave the ultimate sacrifice but a day to commemorate all those who served in the United States Military to recognize their patriotism, love of country and willingness to serve the common good.