



The 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month ... in 1918, this was called Armistice Day, the official end to a horrible war. Over time, it has evolved into the Veteran's Day we now observe here in America. What does this mean to us? What are the facts?

Almost passed from living memory, World War I was supposed to forever end the carnage of war. Yet in truth that war, with the Armistice Day that ended it, is a root of our modern world. We should remember the event and its context.

On June 28, 1914, a lone assassin's bullet was fired in a place well-known to most 21st century readers—Sarajevo. That little spark in a city unknown to most of the world triggered a war that murdered millions. At the time, it was called “The Great War.” Now we call it World War I.

By April 1917, calling it “the war to end all wars,” President Woodrow Wilson declared war against Germany. Americans were asked to remember the *RMS Lusitania*, a passenger ship sunk by a German U-boat in 1915. By November 1918, over 4,000,000 men (called doughboys) were sent “over there.” By Armistice Day, the American dead and wounded exceeded 300,000!¹

When we consider that American troops were not committed to combat until the late spring of 1918, theirs was a horrific casualty ratio! Because the war was so horrible, American and European politicians—and most meant well—tried afterward through the Versailles Peace Treaty and the League of Nations to ensure war would never again scar mankind. All was temporarily quiet on the Western front. But neither Wilson's Fourteen Points nor November's peace prevented another war.

Twenty years later, the sons of doughboys bled and died again at Pearl Harbor, in Europe, and throughout the Pacific. Five years later, they fought in Korea. Ten years after that, their sons suffered in steamy Asian jungles. Today, the sons and grandsons of Vietnam veterans fight in Afghanistan and Iraq.


All these are included in Veteran's Day observances and usually overshadow World War I. Yet there were terrible sacrifices in that conflict, which forever changed our world. Those veterans helped purchase today's freedom.

Throughout our history as a nation, men and women have fought, suffered, bled, and died so we could enjoy a freedom unmatched anywhere or anytime in the history of mankind. This is not bragging. Rather, it is a realistic assessment of the leadership role afforded America and the sacrifices made by her people.

Patriotism requires us to appreciate the ultimate sacrifice paid by so many of America's soldiers. No doughboys remain now. Frank W. Buckles was the last American World War I veteran, and he died at 110 years of age on February 27, 2011. As World War I has passed from living memory, their lives and the reasons for their sacrifice must never be forgotten!

This Veteran's Day, let's honor our dead by working and hoping for a true and lasting peace. Perhaps that is the best way we can observe the original intent of Armistice Day.

Sincerely,



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Sources:

¹ The Great War, Resources. WWI Casualties and Deaths. PBS. Viewed October 14, 2013.
http://www.pbs.org/greatwar/resources/casdeath_pop.html

² The Washinton Post, "Last U.S. World War I veteran Frank W. Buckles dies at 110." February 28, 2011. Viewed October 14, 2013.
<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2011/02/28/AR2011022800165.html?sid=ST2011022801892>

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