

Veterans Day 2015

In 1918, on the eleventh hour, of the eleventh day, of the eleventh month, the world rejoiced and celebrated. After four years of bitter war, the Allied powers signed an armistice with Germany in a rail car of Generalissimo of the Allied Armies, Marshall Foch in the forest of Compiègne (Kom-pien-yeh) at Rethondes (Ray-tone-deh), France, bringing the First World War to a close. All over the globe, there were many celebrations; no doubt the world never before witnessed such rejoicing. “The War to End All Wars,” was over.

In November, 1919, His Majesty King George V, stated, “All locomotion should cease, so that, in perfect stillness, the thoughts of everyone may be concentrated on reverent remembrance of the glorious dead.” President Woodrow Wilson issued his Armistice Day Proclamation. The last paragraph set the tone for future observances:

To us in America, the reflections of Armistice Day will be filled with solemn pride in the heroism of those who died in the country's service and with gratitude for the victory, both because of the thing from which it has freed us and because of the opportunity it has given America to show her sympathy with peace and justice in the councils of the nation.

In 1927, Congress issued a resolution requesting President Calvin Coolidge issue a proclamation calling upon officials to display the flag of the United States on all government buildings on November 11 and inviting the people to observe the day in

schools and churches. But it was not until 1938 that Congress passed a bill that each November 11, “shall be dedicated to the cause of world peace and ... hereafter celebrated as Armistice Day.”

That same year President Franklin Delano Roosevelt signed a bill making the day a legal holiday in the District of Columbia. For sixteen years, the United States formally observed Armistice Day with impressive ceremonies at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, where the Chief Executive or his representative placed a wreath. On that day at 11 am, in many towns across our great country, all traffic was stopped, words of tribute and thanks were expressed, volleys were fired, and taps were played.

After World War II, there were many new veterans who had little or no association with World War I. The word “armistice,” means simply a truce; therefore, as years passed, the significance of the title changed. Leaders of veteran organizations decided to change this and sought to have an official designation making November 11 the time to honor all those who served and fought in the various American wars, not just in World War I.

In Emporia, Kansas, on November 11, 1953, instead of an Armistice Day program, there was a Veterans Day observance. Ed Rees, of Emporia, was so impressed that he introduced a bill into the House to change the name to Veterans Day. After this passed, Mr. Rees wrote to all state governors and asked for their approval and

cooperation in observing the changed holiday. The name was change to Veterans Day by an Act of Congress on May 24, 1954. In October of that year, President Eisenhower called on all citizens to observe the day by remembering the sacrifices of all those who served so proudly and fought so gallantly through rededication of the task of promoting an enduring peace. The President referred to the changed name as “Veterans Day” in honor of the servicemen and women of all of America’s wars.

Today, across our great country, and throughout the world, Americans remember and honor our nation’s veterans; the brave men and women who fought during times of war and who fought to maintain the peace, and who have assured us our freedoms through their duty, their honor, their courage, and their selfless service.

To all our veterans, no matter where or when you served, regardless of in what branch of military you served, the citizens of the Borough of Essex Fells have a simple, yet heartfelt message – Thank you. Thank you for your selfless service in peacetime and in war, here in this nation and throughout the world. Our veterans deserve the assurances and recognition from a grateful Borough and nation that what they accomplished, as such a high personal cost to them, enables all of us to enjoy our liberties and freedoms and a future free from fear.

Our veterans have paid for these freedoms with their courage and honor. They have defended America through both the best and the worst times and they have

performed their difficult duties tirelessly and with little recognition or fanfare. For their service, they have neither sought fortune nor fame. A simple love of country and liberty compelled them to serve this great nation of ours.

The Borough of Essex Fells also wants you to know that we recognize that your example serves to inspire others who follow in your footsteps. For our soldiers today, like the veterans who came before them, they will always draw their strength from the values that you veterans has so bravely demonstrated: loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity, personal courage, and love of country. These values have always been with our troops and continue to sustain them to this very day as they are placed in harm's way in Afghanistan and throughout the world. They are the essential values embodied by all who have served, and continue to serve, our nation.

Our veterans, better than anyone else, understand that our nation was founded not on the greatness of the past, but the promise of the future. They know that freedom is not free and that eternal vigilance is the price we must always pay for our liberty.

The Borough of Essex Fells must resolve to thank and support all our veterans for their outstanding service to our nation. Let us thank them not only today, but also every day. Remember our veterans and remember that they paid physically and emotionally to keep our nation safe. And let us also remember our present servicemen and women – America's future veterans – America's sons and daughters

- who have selflessly made the decision to defend our rights and freedoms that we enjoy and cherish as Americans.

Additionally, we remember and give thanks to the veterans' families, for they have also paid a price for our freedoms.

We will never be able to adequately thank our veterans, our soldiers and their families, but we must always respect, honor, and support them.

To the Essex Fells Sixth Grade Class who joins us today, there is something that I'd like you to know and to remember. These veterans with us here today, these older senior gentlemen and lady, these neighbors, these folks that you see around town - - - were soldiers once. Essex Fells veterans have served our country and fought in our nations wars all over the world - as soldiers, airmen, sailors, Marines, coast guardsmen, WAVES, in every branch of service and in every theater of operation. They did so, honestly, because our country asked them to do it, because they felt it was their duty to serve, and because each felt that it was expected of them.

"Hero" is a term that today is too often used and misapplied. To me, a "hero" is someone who unconditionally gives himself to something greater than himself. One who has all to risk, and little or nothing to gain, for the benefit of others; one who shows acts of bravery and courage and loyalty and love of country, without fanfare or fuss. Kids, today, you stand here in the presence of heroes. These veterans, "my

guys” – the gentlemen and lovely lady who stand before you – when, not much older than yourselves, proudly and with great sacrifice answered the call of our nation and served her with a great sense of duty, honor, and country. All is ask of each of you is to remember that, to remember them, and to appreciate all that they have done. Please take a moment to reflect upon the importance of what President John Kennedy said, “A nation reveals itself not only by the men (and women) it produces but also by the men (and women) it honors, the men (and women) it remembers.”

In closing, I would like to read one of my favorite passages, written by Father Dennis Edward O’Brien, Sergeant, United States Marine Corps, which reminds me of the thanks we owe to our veterans:

It is the soldier, not the reporter, who has given us the freedom of the press;

It is the soldier, not the poet, who has given us the freedom of speech;

It is the soldier, not the campus organizer, who gives us the freedom of demonstrations;

It is the soldier, who salutes the flag, who serves beneath the flag, and whose coffin is draped by the flag, who allows the protester to burn the flag.

I would only add, “It is the American soldier” who gives us these very cherished freedoms. For as General Kelly stated when speaking about the very character of the American soldier, “If we are truly to be the land of the free, then we have to be the home of the brave.”

A grateful Borough remembers; a grateful Borough gives thanks; and a grateful Borough will always honor her veterans.

God bless you all, God bless and protect our veterans of today and those of the future, and may God continue to bless the Borough of Essex Fells and these United States.

Edward P. Abbot

Mayor

Borough of Essex Fells

November 11, 2015