

Holidays that Celebrate Veterans

Many holidays celebrate U.S. veterans. Each of these holidays has a special meaning and can be commemorated by personally thanking a veteran, flying the American flag, going to parades and placing flags on veterans' graves. Following is background on the traditional holidays and their origin.

Armed Forces Day: Third Saturday of May

Originally, the U.S. citizens celebrated each branch of the service on a different day -- Army Day, Air Force Day, Marine Corps Day, Navy Day and Coast Guard Day. In 1949, these branches were consolidated into a single-day celebration, called Armed Forces Day.

Memorial Day: Last Monday in May

Memorial Day is a day to remember those who have died serving the country. It was officially proclaimed on May 5, 1868, by General John Logan; and it was first observed on May 30, 1868. President Lyndon Johnson officially declared Waterloo, N.Y., as the birthplace of Memorial Day, and Congress passed the National Holiday Act of 1971, making it a federal holiday. Originally, Memorial Day was celebrated on May 30; but, now, it is the last Monday in May.

Flag Day: June 14

Flag Day is also called Flag Birthday, and the holiday was started in 1885, by a Wisconsin teacher. President Woodrow Wilson made Flag Day official on May 30, 1916; and President Harry Truman signed an Act of Congress on August 3, 1949, designating June 14th as National Flag Day.

Purple Heart Day: August 7

The Purple Heart military decoration (then called the Badge of Military Merit) was created on August 7, 1782, by George Washington during the Revolutionary War. According to Military Order of the Purple Heart's PR Director, John Bircher, "We are aware of eight people who received it [Purple Heart] from General Washington." Since then, August 7 has marked a celebration of Purple Heart veterans and their courage – expressing recognition for those wounded or killed in action.

Veterans Day: November 11

World War I ended on the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month in 1918 – then becoming known as Armistice Day. Soon after the end of World War II, a veteran of that war organized "National Veterans Day" with a parade and festivities to honor all veterans. He chose to hold this on Armistice Day – launching an annual observance of a day to honor all veterans, not just the end of World War I. In 1954, Congress officially passed and President Dwight Eisenhower signed a bill proclaiming November 11 as Veterans Day.

