



THE AMERICAN LEGION
Veterans Strengthening America

NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS

PO BOX 1055, INDIANAPOLIS, IN, 46206-1055 • WWW.LEGION.ORG • P: (317) 630-1350 • F: (317) 630-1223

Suggested Remarks for Veterans Day 2024

The American Legion National Headquarters
Media & Communications
P.O. Box 1055
Indianapolis, IN 46206
(317) 630-1298
jraughter@legion.org

November 11th, 1918, was a day of celebration throughout the free world. A conflict without precedent was ending. An armistice stopping the “Great War,” was signed. Advances in the use of artillery, chemical weapons and machine guns led to more than nine million military deaths and an estimated eight million civilian deaths during the war that devastated large swaths of Europe, as well as parts of the Middle East, Africa and the Asia-Pacific region.

World War I was so horrific that many referred to it as the “war to end all wars.” Unfortunately, the optimism was short-lived.

A generation later, a second world war would follow, which was even deadlier than the first. Even so, The American Legion never wavered on the significance of the 1918 armistice. The nation’s largest veterans organization had been advocating for “Armistice Day,” to be observed as a national holiday since 1920.

In the aftermath of World War II and the Korean War, The American Legion led an “all Veterans Day” celebration in Emporia, Kansas, which was seen as the spark that lit the movement for November 11th to be a day to honor **every** American who honorably served in our nation’s military since the Revolutionary War.

The advocacy paid off. On October 8th, 1954, President Dwight Eisenhower signed a proclamation officially changing Armistice Day to Veterans Day.

In its “Suggested Talk for American Legion Speakers,” which was released to mark the first official Veterans Day observance seventy years ago, our organization spelled out its vision for the new national holiday.

Quote – “Veterans Day...like the Armistice Day of before...will ever remain a day of remembrance ...remembrance for those who have placed their love of God and country, their devotion to liberty and freedom, above even life itself. But also it should be a day of rejoicing... rejoicing that American manhood and womanhood always have measured up to our responsibilities.” – unquote.

While those responsibilities may have shifted and evolved with each subsequent generation, the love for this country is a common thread that bonds veterans from the earliest days of our nation’s founding to those serving today.

One responsibility that all Americans should carry is the remembrance of those who have made our freedom possible. By virtue of your attendance here, you have shown an appreciation for veterans. The people here are veterans, friends of veterans, family of veterans, co-workers of veterans and neighbors of veterans. It is up to us to ensure that every veteran believes that his or her service to this country is respected by their fellow Americans. There are many tangible ways that we can acknowledge their sacrifice, but the easiest is to simply say, “Thank you for your service to our country.”

Winston Churchill was speaking of the Royal Air Force’s defense of Britain when he delivered his famous “Never was so much owed by so many to so few” speech in 1940.

The same could be said of American veterans in 2024. In 1980, about 18 percent of U.S. adults were veterans. Today, it is approximately 5 percent. Active-duty servicemembers comprise less than one-half of one percent of the U.S. population.

Yet when Hurricanes Helene and Milton wreaked havoc on the southeastern United States, thousands of active-duty, Reserve and National Guard servicemembers mobilized to provide life-saving relief and recovery operations.

An estimated 43,000 U.S. troops and a dozen warships are deployed in the Middle East. Marine Corps detachments provide security at U.S. embassies worldwide.

Members of the Coast Guard perform an average of 42 search and rescue missions daily and facilitate the movement of \$15.6 billion dollars of goods and commodities through our maritime transportation system every day.

ALL Americans benefit from the service of this small and distinguished group of volunteers who currently comprise the U.S. Armed Forces.

Every year America loses distinguished veterans who were eyewitnesses to events that shaped our world. Two notable veterans lost in 2024 were Lou Conter and Roger Donlon. One served in World War II, the other Vietnam. They each had different definitions of heroism.

Conter was the sole survivor of the attack on the *U.S.S. Arizona* when he passed away at age 102 on April 1st.

“People call us heroes,” Conter said at the 75th anniversary of the Pearl Harbor attack. “We’re not the heroes. The 1,177 who went down with the ship are the heroes. You have to remember we got to go home, get married, have children and grandchildren, and we’ve lived a good life. Those who didn’t get to do that should be called the heroes.” – unquote.

Conter's humility was not uncommon among veterans who forever remember those who never made it home. But Donlon, who made it home from Vietnam, fits every definition one could have of a hero.

Donlon was a captain with the Army 7th Special Forces Group when a Viet Cong battalion launched a predawn attack on his camp in 1964. During the five-hour battle, he endured multiple and severe wounds, while valiantly fighting back and directing the camp's defense. He continuously exposed himself to great danger, administering first aid and saving the lives of fellow soldiers. His actions resulted in the successful defense of his camp and inspired not just his own soldiers but Vietnamese allies.

Donlon's bravery was recognized by President Lyndon B. Johnson, who presented him with a Medal of Honor for his actions.

An online obituary posted this year quoted Donlon's definition of heroism. "In my situation and every other situation that leads to the Medal of Honor, there is absolutely no input from the recipient. It's all done by observers," Donlon said. "Heroism is a product of what other people see." -Unquote.

Donlon remained in the Army and retired as a colonel in 1988. We see and remember your heroism, Colonel Donlon, along with that of so many other veterans.

On this Veterans Day, we honor not an armistice, but the men and women who have served and continue to serve in the greatest military the world has ever known.

Our message to America's veterans – past and present – is simple. We will never forget you.

Thank you for being here. God bless America.