

MAY 15, 2018

Family

The Magazine For Military Families
familymedia.com

Memorial Day VS. Veterans Day

How to explain the differences to people
who may not know

IN
REMEMBRANCE

Memorial Day vs. Veterans Day

How to explain the differences to people who may not know

By DONNA BOYLE SCHWARTZ

Military families are keenly aware of the importance and significance of two national holidays set aside to honor the service and sacrifice of those who serve in the U.S. armed forces, Memorial Day and Veterans Day. However, many non-military people may not know the difference between these two commemorations and need to have the key distinctions explained to them.

The most crucial difference between these observations comes down to one thing: loss of life. While both holidays honor and celebrate the service of all military personnel, Memorial Day is set aside specifically to pay solemn tribute to the memory of those who died while serving their country, particularly those who died in battle or as a result of wounds sustained in battle. Therefore, it is not considered appropriate to use the Memorial Day holiday to thank active or former military personnel for their service; it is more fitting to express condolences to military families and personnel who have lost loved ones, friends, and colleagues.

Veterans Day, on the other hand, is the day set aside to thank and honor *all* those who served honorably in the military—in wartime or peacetime. While those who died are also remembered, Veterans Day is largely intended to thank *living* veterans for their service and to acknowledge that their contributions to our national security are appreciated.

Memorial Day is observed on the last Monday in May and is the older of the two holidays. Memorial Day was originally known as Decoration Day, because its purpose was to decorate the graves of Civil War soldiers. The holiday was first proposed by former Union Army Maj. Gen. John A. Logan to honor those who had died in the armed forces, according to the Memorial Day Foundation, a nonprofit organization dedicated to increasing and restoring patriotic awareness and respect for Memorial Day. Logan designated May 30, 1868, “for the purpose of strewing with flowers or otherwise decorating the graves of comrades who died in defense of their country,” stating, “Let no vandalism of avarice or neglect, no ravages of time, testify to the present or to the coming generations that we have forgotten, as a people, the cost of free and undivided republic.”

Veterans Day is marked annually on Nov. 11 and has its roots in World War I. Originally the holiday was known as Armistice Day, because it celebrates the date—Nov. 11, 1918—of the armistice that ended all World War I combat. The first Armistice Day was held in 1919, and President Woodrow Wilson stated, “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 nations.” Nov. 11 was designated a national holiday honoring World War I veterans by Congress in 1938; the name was changed from Armistice Day to Veterans Day in 1954 to pay tribute to all veterans for their service.

