

Veterans Day 2021

A Family Digging Podcast

Paul: Hello again, and welcome to our Family Digging podcast. I am Paul Hendee and I'm here with Carolyn Lancaster. Today we are going to talk about Veterans Day.

Paul: In 1921 an unknown American World War I soldier was buried at Arlington National Cemetery, overlooking the Potomac River and the city of Washington, D.C. This site became the focal point of reverence for America's veterans.

Carolyn: Similar ceremonies occurred earlier in England and France, where an unknown soldier was buried in each nation's highest place of honor (England's Westminster Cathedral and France's Arc de Triomphe). These memorial gestures all took place on November 11, giving universal recognition to the celebrated ending of World War I fighting at 11 am on November 11, 1918 (the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month). The day became known as Armistice Day. It became a national holiday in 1938. (What took you so long, guys?) If the idealistic hope had been realized that World War I was "the war to end all wars", November 11th might still be called Armistice Day. But only a few years later war broke out again in Europe. 16.5 million Americans took part. 407,000 of them died in service, more than 292,000 in battle.

Paul: In 1947 a World War II veteran from Alabama named Raymond Weeks organized a “National Veterans Day”, which included a parade and other festivities in Birmingham to honor ALL veterans. The event was held on November 11th, then designated Armistice Day. Later, U.S. Representative Edward Rees of Kansas proposed a bill that would change Armistice Day to Veterans Day. In 1954, Congress passed the bill that President Eisenhower signed proclaiming November 11th as Veterans Day. Raymond Weeks’ local parade and ceremonies are now an annual event celebrated nationwide.

Carolyn: Memorial Day 1958, two more unidentified American war dead were brought from overseas and interred in the plaza next to the unknown soldier from World War I. One was killed in World War II and the other in the Korean War. In 1984, an unknown serviceman from the Vietnam War was placed alongside the others. In 1998, he was identified as Air Force 1st Lieutenant Michael Joseph Blassye, and his remains were removed for burial. To honor these men, symbolic of all Americans who gave their lives in all wars, an Army Guard, the 3rd US Infantry (The Old Guard), keeps day and night vigil.

Paul: The focal point for official national ceremonies for Veterans Day continues to be the memorial amphitheater built around the Tomb of the Unknowns. At 11 am on November 11th, a combined color guard representing all military services executes “Present Arms” at the Tomb. Each year the nation’s tribute to its war dead is symbolized by the laying of a presidential wreath. The bugler plays “Taps”. And the rest of the ceremony takes place in the amphitheater. (The history just given comes primarily from a US Department of Veterans Affairs paper on the origins of Veterans Day. We did shorten it somewhat.)

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Carolyn: 2021 marks the 100th anniversary of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier being established. There will be a 9 am flyover and full honors procession honoring the centennial anniversary. At 10:30 am a prelude concert will be offered. The wreath laying is at 11 am at the Tomb, and the National Observance Program immediately follows at the Memorial Amphitheater, ending at noon.

Paul: If you plan to go to Arlington National Cemetery, be sure to go to their website to find the details you will need to know. The link is: <https://www.arlingtoncemetery.mil/Tomb100> . These ceremonies will also be live-streamed on Twitter (@ARLINGTONNATL #Tomb100) and at <https://www.Army.mil/tomb>). Arlington's website also has a Resource section, which is interesting. And they have a new Education Program for all ages at <https://www.arlingtoncemetery.mil/Education> . We would be amazed if C-SPAN does not cover it as well on TV or YouTube.

Carolyn: President Biden has declared November as National Veterans and Military Families month. We have been mulling over how to honor our Military Families as well as our Veterans this year. What a teachable opportunity November 11th can be for all of us in 2021, especially for the children in military families! I was blessed to have been raised in a home where we were regularly exposed to teachable moments in history; it's a whole different thing than learning history just in school - much more impactful. If we want our children growing up to honor our veterans and their families, it behooves us to teach them.

Paul: Another way to honor them is to teach children about the members of their family who have served since the founding of their country. We call this family history. Consider making a family project of it this year, researching your ancestors, and learning the stories of those who served going back as far as you can; then decorate a tree with leaves representing each one to honor them next year. If you need help getting that started, just email us at info@familydigging.com. We'll be happy to help any way we can.

Carolyn: As usual, if you wish to hear the podcast again, or want a copy of the transcript (which contains all the links to the places mentioned today), please go to familydigging.com and look under the Podcasts and Transcripts tabs on the Home Page. You are welcome to make a copy of our transcripts for personal use only; for any other purpose, please contact us by email first. If you wish to be notified of our next podcast, or if you would like access to our growing Library, please send us an email (at the address above) with your name, email address and any password you choose, and Paul will get you access and onto our mailing list. Be assured, we do not share your personal information with anyone for any reason.

Paul: Well, fellow Diggers, we hope you enjoyed this podcast, and that you have a great Veterans Day!

Both: And Happy Digging!

