

Veterans Day: “Appropriate Homage”

In 1926, a concurrent resolution of the US Congress held it “fitting that the recurring anniversary of [the armistice which brought World War One to an end] should be commemorated with thanksgiving and prayer and exercises designed to perpetuate peace through good will and mutual understanding between nations ...”

In 1938, Congress enshrined November 11 of each year as an American holiday “dedicated to the cause of world peace and to be hereafter celebrated and known as ‘Armistice Day.’”

Somewhere between 15 and 19 million human beings — 1/3 of them civilians — perished in World War One. Fitting, don’t you think, to set aside a day each year for remembrance of the tragedy and for resolve against its repetition, however vain the latter hope might prove?

But Armistice Day is a thing of the past. In 1954, Congress acted yet again, striking the word “Armistice” from the 1938 law and inserting the word “Veterans.” Why? “[I]n order,” wrote president Dwight D. Eisenhower “that a grateful Nation might pay appropriate homage to the veterans of all its wars.”

What does that mean, 63 years after Eisenhower’s proclamation and 99 years since the guns fell silent? *USA Today* reports that it means Free Stuff.

Should I care to cruise town with my DD-214 in hand this weekend, I could avail myself of free car washes, free haircuts, free flu shots, free food (including, no kidding, red, white and blue pancakes), and discounts on everything from toys to shoes to lumber.

I’ve got nothing against Free Stuff, of course, nor against anyone offering it or taking advantage of the offers.

But when I mentally stack up those red, white and blue pancakes next to a pile of human corpses tens of millions high (including the bodies of more than one million US military personnel since 1775), my appetite deserts me.

I’d rather have Armistice Day. “Prayer and exercises designed to perpetuate peace” seem far more appropriate to the occasion than a free car wash. Far more respectful, I feel, to all those whose lives have been cut short by war, and for that matter, to veterans in particular.

On a different armistice day — VJ Day in 1945 — my wife’s father and my grandfather were serving aboard (different) US Navy ships in the Pacific. By way of honoring the memories of Bill Millay and Woodrow Knapp this Veterans Day, we’ve donated \$11 to Veterans for Peace

(veteransforpeace.org) to help make EVERY day Armistice Day. I hope you'll do the same.