

FAMOUS EVENTS: What happened on ... ?

Was ist am 11. November 1918 geschehen?
Waffenstillstand des ersten Weltkrieges / end of World War One

Some, unable to march any longer, rode in buses. Others walked but were hunched over, the ravages of years bearing down on once-strong shoulders.

Still others, a generation or two or three younger, stepped more lively if not more proudly.

Together, the region's veterans who strode or rode the streets of Downtown yesterday in the 89th annual Veterans Day Parade returned with humble gratitude the salutes and waves and applause that a diverse audience offered to express thanks for their service and sacrifice.

At times, the mood was emotional. At the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month — exactly 90 years from the moment when World War I ended — a bugler from the Plum High School Band played taps. A middle-aged man in a brown hooded sweatshirt dabbed tears from his eyes. He was not alone.

Overall, the mood along the route from Mellon Arena to the Hilton Pittsburgh hotel was celebratory, respectful and thankful of the service rendered the country.

Parade-goers, some waving American flags, lauded them all, from veterans of the war in Iraq with fresh faces to World War II vets, their hair now silver, their numbers dwindling by about 1,000 men daily; from those who served in the mountains of Korea to the jungles of Vietnam; from Gold Star Parents to Disabled American Veterans to Paralyzed Veterans of America; from members of the Veterans of Foreign Wars and American Legion to high schoolers in junior ROTC programs.

Army Brig. Gen. Gregory E. Couch, the parade's grand marshal, thanked the crowd for its support. It means so much to those who served, he noted, as well as those who continue to do

Veterans Day

11/11/05

A time for reflection amid the sacrifice of war

The First World War — optimistically thought at the time to be the War to End All Wars — was a barbarous passage of blood and tears that ended on a curious note that read like poetry: When the guns officially fell silent in 1918 under the terms of the armistice, it was the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month.

The ranks of those who fought in that war have been obliterated by time's passing parade and, 87 years on, we are painfully aware that, short of the promised age when swords shall be beaten into plowshares, there is no war to end all wars. There is only duty, honor and eternal vigilance as the price of liberty.

Yet we live in an age of unequal sacrifice. Thousands of young American men and women are in war zones like Iraq and Afghanistan; thousands more are in uneasy billets in places like Bosnia or the Korean Peninsula or in ships on perilous seas. But at home, the war on terror has become mostly a matter of vague public anxiety, nothing much to interfere with trips to malls or sporting events. The signature discomforts of past wars — blackouts, food rationing — are unknown.

Unless a relative is serving somewhere in the military, the average American can easily be detached, living life as a disinterested observer of newspaper headlines or television

images. This is not a criticism, not a reflection on anybody, just an observation: How lucky we all are!

We are lucky for a reason. Whole legions of patriotic souls are facing the dangers of a dangerous world on our behalf. People can argue — as this newspaper has done — on whether the war in Iraq is helping or hindering the cause of national security, but today is not the day for such arguments. Whatever the wisdom of current policies, freedom does depend on the existence of ranks of Americans imbued with a strong sense of patriotic duty.

Today is the day we honor them, those who have served and those still in the field, and thank God for them.

In 1954, after Congress changed Armistice Day to Veterans Day, President Dwight D. Eisenhower issued a proclamation: "On that day, let us solemnly remember the sacrifices of all those who fought so valiantly, on the seas, in the air, and on foreign shores, to preserve our heritage of freedom, and let us reconsecrate ourselves to the task of promoting an enduring peace so that their efforts shall not have been in vain."

Thank you, veterans. When you march today, when the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month comes around again, let none of us forget the enduring importance of what you have done.

so in Iraq and Afghanistan on yet another Veterans Day, which originally was conceived to commemorate the end of the "war to end all wars."

High-spirited high school bands added to the patriotic atmosphere, playing the official songs of the Army, Navy, Air

Force and Marines, and "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" and "God Bless America."

After 75 minutes, the last unit passed by the reviewing stand. The crowd dispersed.

"It was a good parade," a woman said into a cell phone. Indeed, it was.