

FAMOUS EVENTS: What happened on ... ?

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

11/11/88  
Armistice Day, 70 years later

Seventy years ago today, the guns fell silent after four years of slaughter in World War I. It was the first Armistice Day, a holiday that we now mark as Veterans Day to honor also those who fought in subsequent wars.

But it should now be clear that the so-called Great War surpassed even World War II as the worst catastrophe of the 20th century. The latter war was probably inevitable, thanks to the poisonous creeds that had come to rule Germany and Russia.

World War I was not: It was Europe's last old-fashioned, non-ideological war. But it laid the groundwork for the rise of Nazism, communism and milder forms of statism in other countries — including the United States.

World War I ended the most peaceful, most productive century that Europe had known since the fall of the Roman Empire. Without its brutal dislocations, it is inconceivable that Lenin's tiny Bolshevik faction could have seized power in Russia. Without the vindictive peace terms dictated by the victors, Hitler would also have remained on the fringe.

The war's effects on America were more

subtle. As historian Robert Nisbet observed in last spring's Jefferson Lecture sponsored by the National Endowment for the Humanities, America before 1914 had what "was probably the most decentralized government among all the Western nations." The war changed that — most obviously in economic organization.

At President Woodrow Wilson's behest, Congress nationalized shipping lines, railroads, mines and telephone systems. It created new boards to regulate all aspects of industrial production and labor, including wages, and even a Food Administration.

But "that was only the beginning," says Mr. Nisbet. "Neighborhood watchers" were appointed with "instructions to report any conceivably disloyal remarks made in their own neighborhoods."

The idea of shaping an entire people through centralized control of private or local institutions has prospered ever since.

As we honor the 116,000 Americans who died in World War I, let us also ponder the other deep problems in which they and all their contemporaries were enmeshed.

Veterans Day 11/11/95

*As long as there is war, there will be remembrance*

The world was certain that the day, even the hour, would be remembered forever by future generations. At 11 a.m. on Nov. 11, 1918 — the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month — an armistice was signed ending World War I.

The United States designated Nov. 11 as Armistice Day, a solemn holiday honoring those who died as well as the veterans who had fought in "The War to End All Wars."

Sadly, that hope of lasting peace was shattered by the outbreak of World War II,

followed by the Korean War. To include veterans of those bloody conflicts, Congress in 1954 renamed Nov. 11 Veterans Day.

Even more sadly, the promise of peace has remained unfulfilled in the second half of the 20th century. And so this Veterans Day, the nation also will honor those who served in Vietnam and the Gulf War.

It is fitting that a day be set aside to honor our veterans who sacrificed so much to oppose tyranny; but those so honored today would be the first to wish for a future where there is no need for such an observance.